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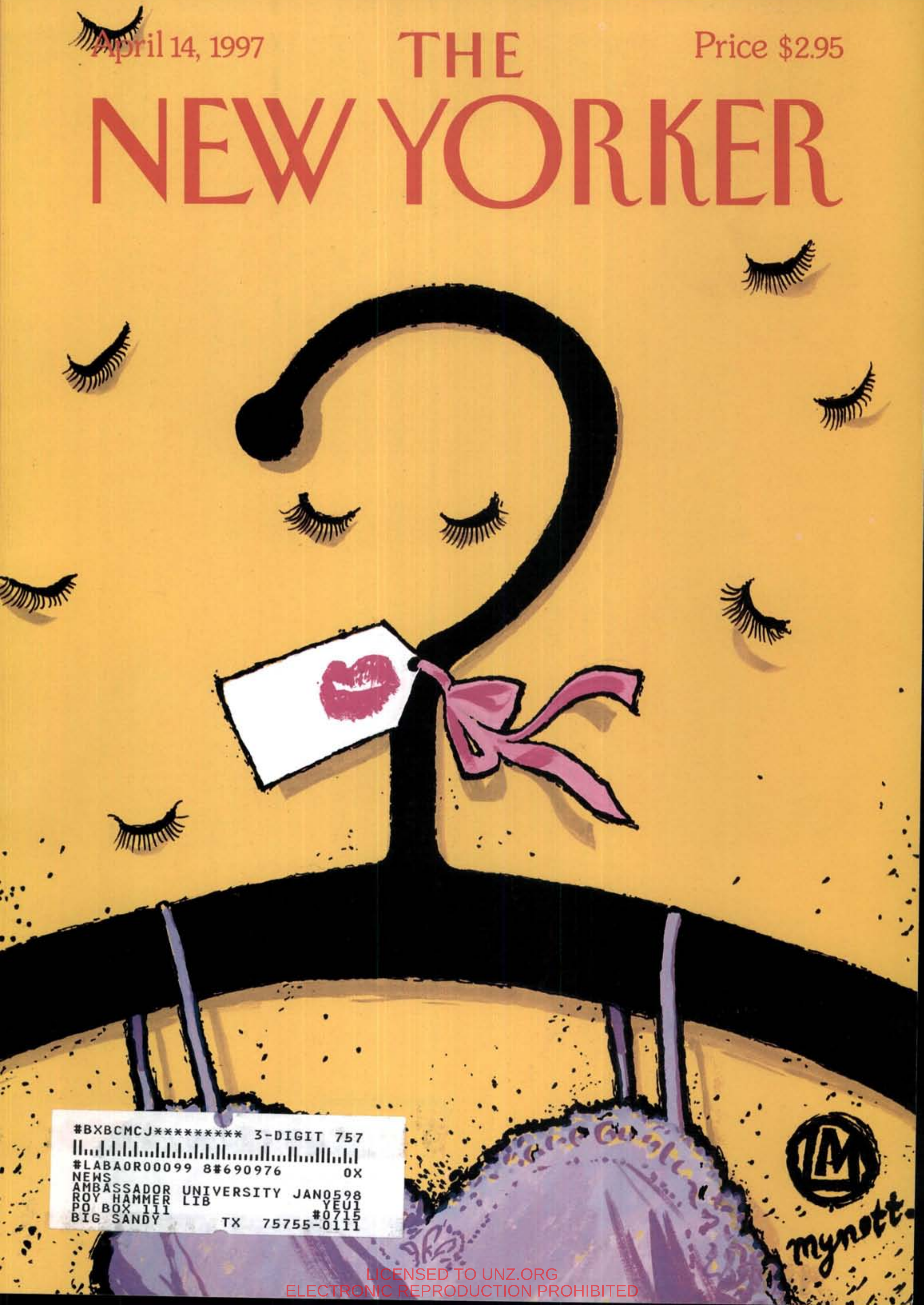

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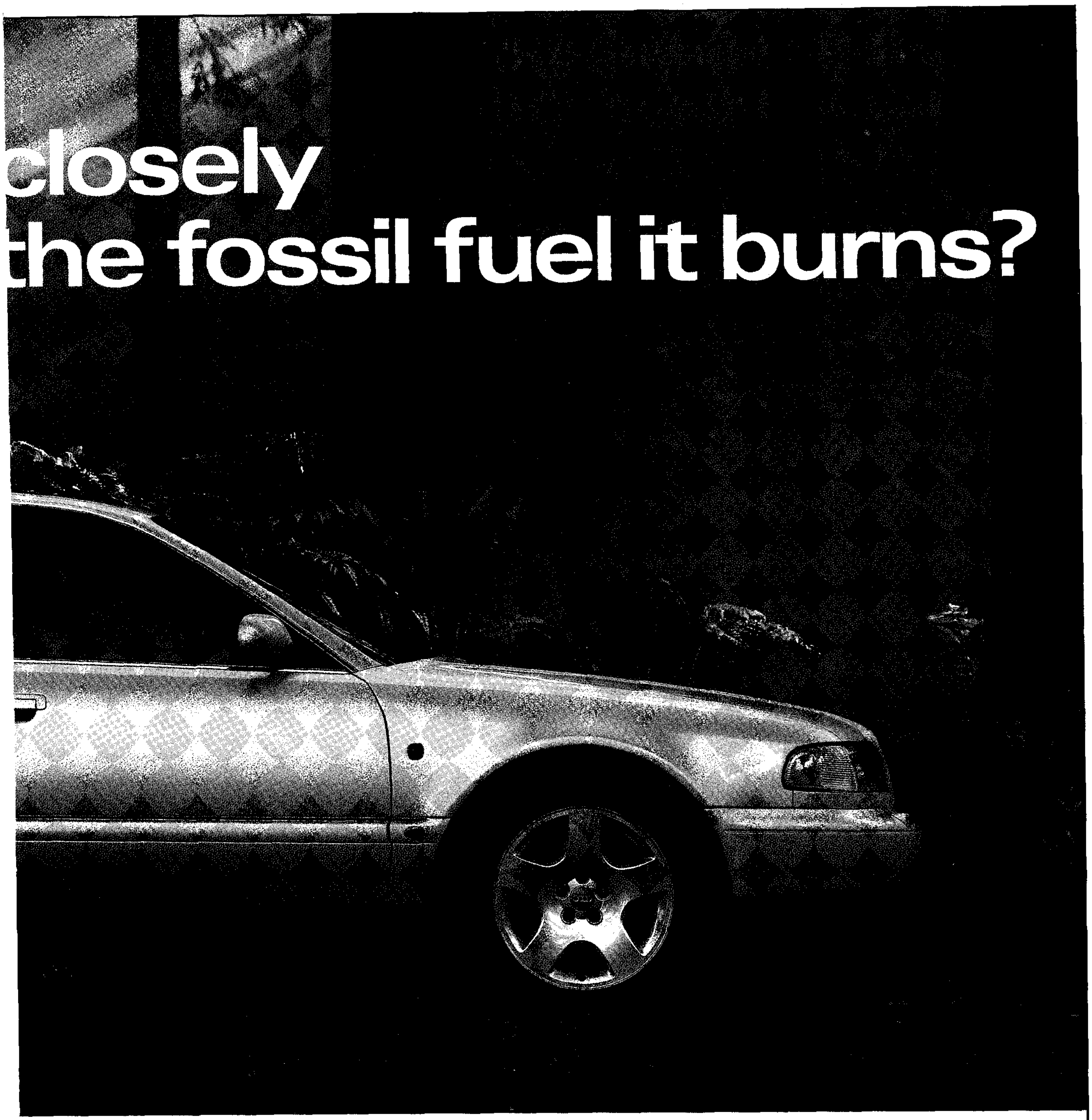

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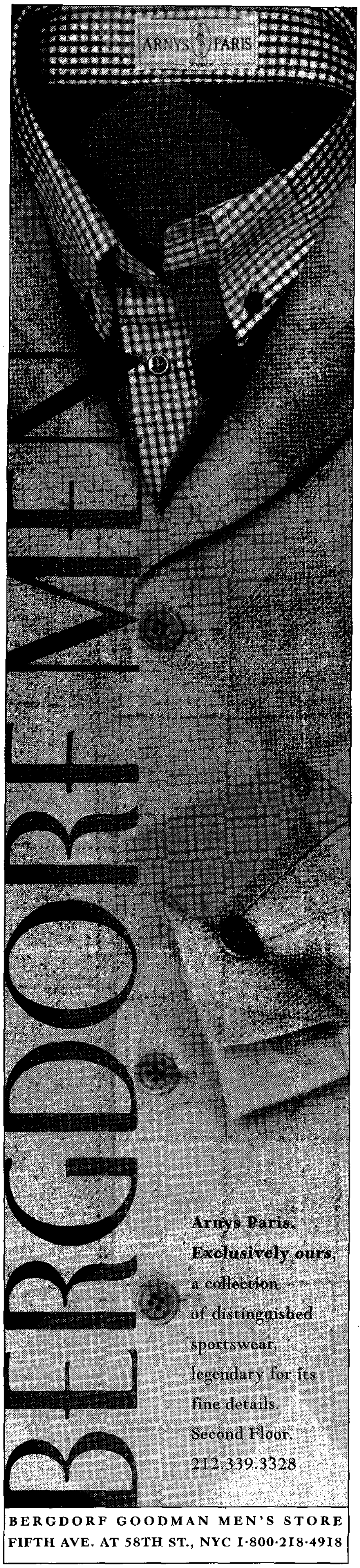

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APRIL 14, 1997

COMMENT Box Score . . . . *Roger Angell* 5
What would Jackie Robinson think of baseball now?

THE MAIL 8

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN 10

THE TALK OF THE TOWN 31
Six ways of approaching Heaven's Gate.

DEPARTMENTS

Annals of Parenthood Making the Grade . . . . *James Atlas* 34
New York's private schools: keeping busy parents a whole lot busier.

Our Far-Flung Correspondents Mr. Kurtz, I Presume . . . . . *Adam Hochschild* 40
The forgotten tyrants of Zaire, and what Joseph Conrad might have made of them.

A REPORTER AT LARGE American Guanxi . . . . *Peter J. Boyer* 48
How a politicking couple from Hawaii used it to get to the Democrats.

AT THE GALLERIES Mary Petty . . . . *Lee Lorenz* 58

PROFILE The Time of Her Life . . . . *Nancy Franklin* 62
In her new play, Wendy Wasserstein goes way beyond the personal—to the political.

ALBUM American Gals . . . . *Bill Blass* 72

FICTION "Honeymoon" . . . . *Kevin Canty* 76
A Montana romance in 1974.

THE CRITICS

Books Michael Holroyd's "Augustus John" . . . . *Victoria Glendinning* 78
Richard Rhodes's "Deadly Feasts" . . . . *Oliver Sacks* 82
Briefly Noted 85
The Theatre "A Doll's House," "The Young Man from Atlanta" . . . . *John Lahr* 86
The Current Cinema "The Saint," "Paradise Road" . . . . *Anthony Lane* 88

POEMS

"Fenceposts" . . . . *Eamon Grennan* 42
"The Miller's Daughter" . . . . *Paul Jenkins* 50

SHOUTS & MURMURS Avoid That Sinking Feeling . . . . *Bruce McCall* 90

COVER *Fashion Hangup, by Lawrence Mynott*

DRAWINGS *Robert Mankoff, Leo Cullum, Bruce Eric Kaplan, Mick Stevens, Ed Arno, Lee Lorenz, Victoria Roberts, Donald Reilly, Sidney Harris, J. B. Handelsman, Michael Maslin, Danny Shanahan*

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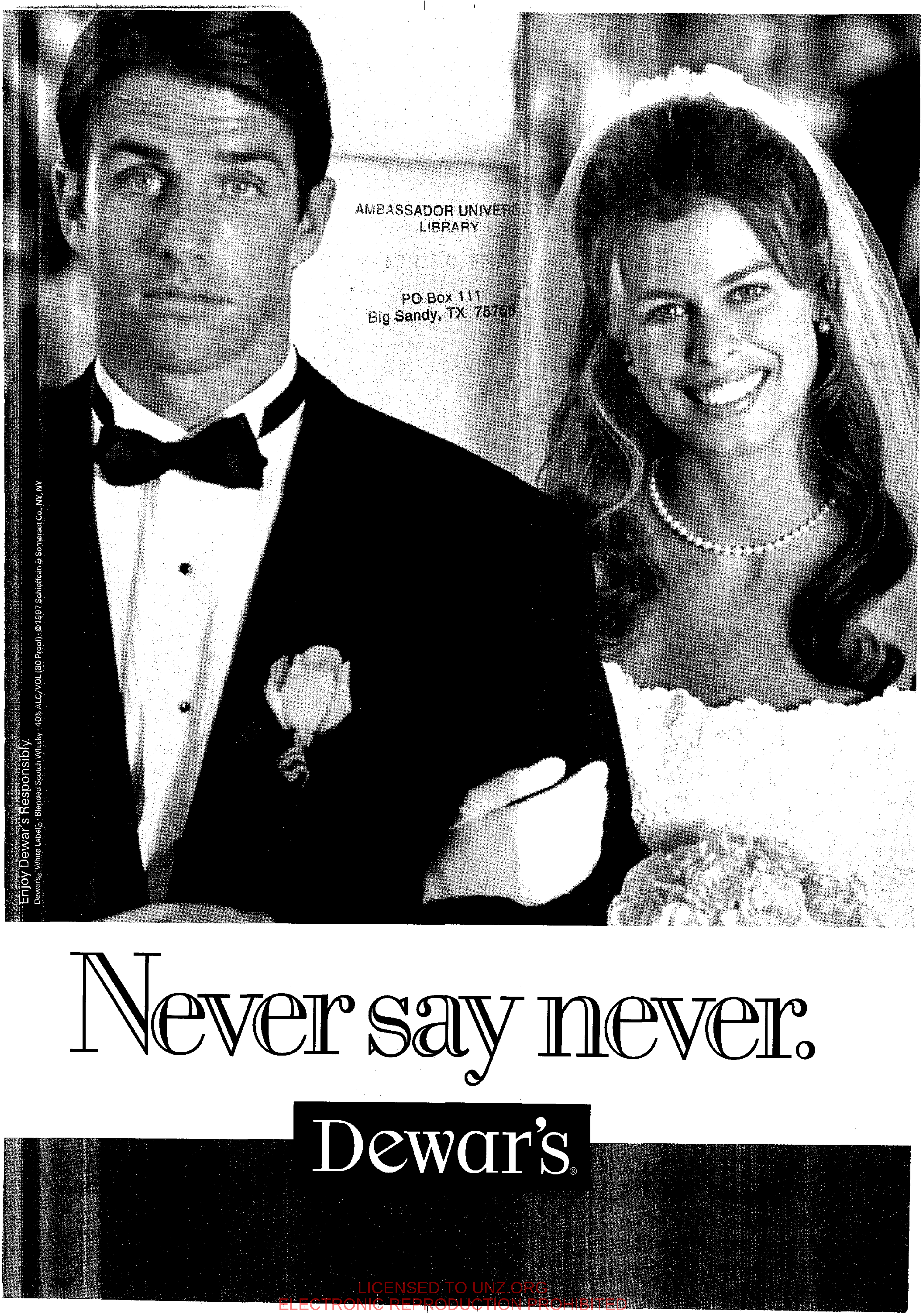
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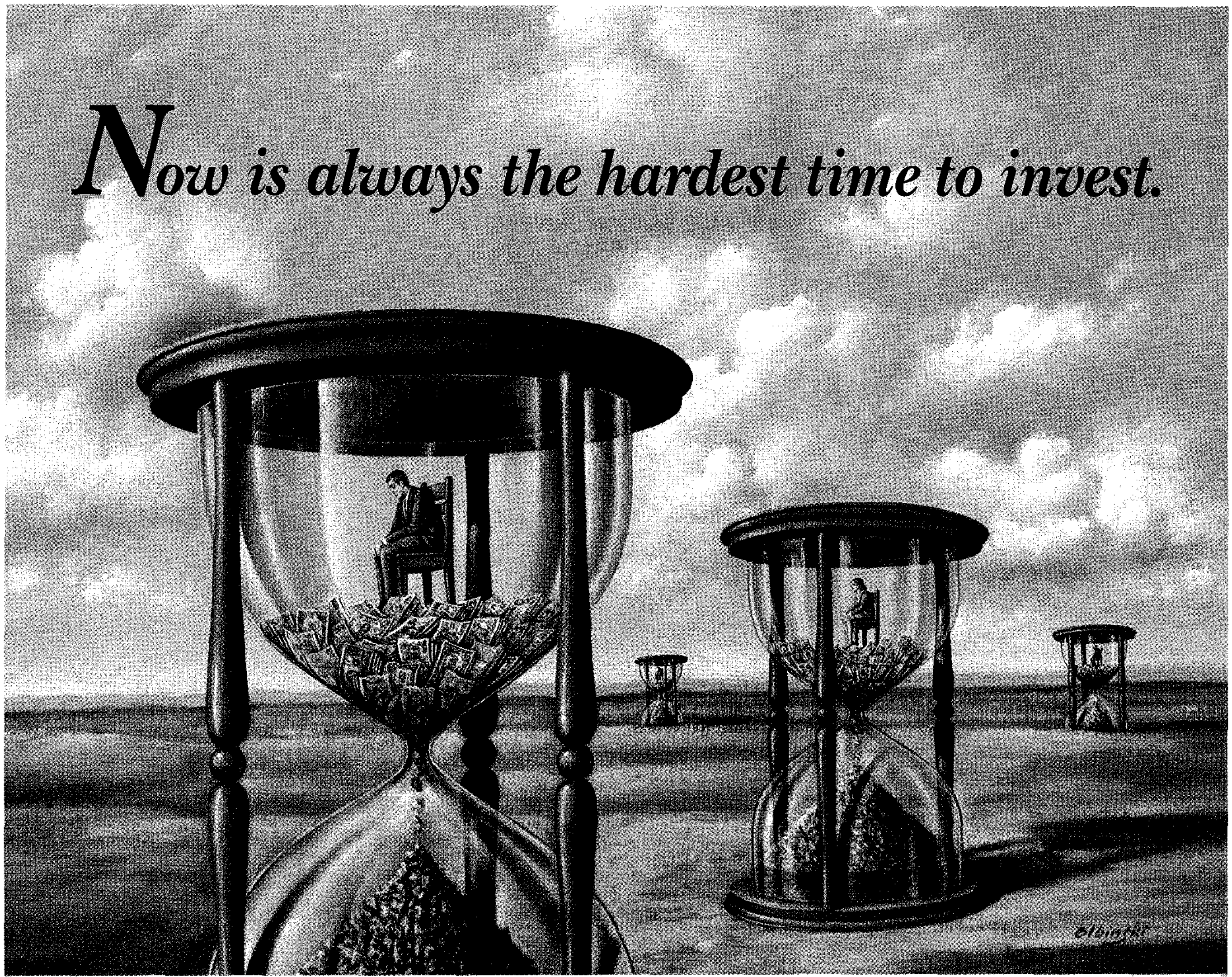
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COMMENT

BOX SCORE

Has baseball fulfilled Jackie Robinson's promise?

BASEBALL, that most ceremonial of sports, will hang more than the usual bunting at Shea Stadium next week. President Clinton—just off the D.L.—and Rachel Robinson will take the field to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Jackie Robinson's début, in a Brooklyn Dodger uniform, as the first African-American to play in the big leagues. The 1997 season has been "dedicated" to Robinson: players and umps will wear commemorative uniform patches emblazoned with a "Breaking Barriers" logo; galas, lectures, videos, and television specials are in the works, and Major League Baseball will donate a million dollars to the Jackie Robinson Foundation. At a moment when college kids are clueless about American history, and professional athletes are blithely ignorant of the glorious feats and fables of their precursors, all this is unexceptionable. But once again the lingering flavor of a big-time sports promotion is more irony than Cracker Jack.

To have been on hand during that first season or two—when Robinson was silently answering a poisonous stream of cowardly racial tauntings on the field with line drives and spectacular steals and rally-killing infield plays—was to understand that here was an authentic American hero. The larger-than-life casting applies as well to Branch Rickey, the cigar-smoking, oratorical Dodger president, who had long searched for a player of Robinson's strength of character to be the man to break the game's ancient color bar, but who refused to take credit for this act of courage and vision; it would shame a man, he once said, to accept praise for doing what quite plainly needed to be done. Both men, it is certain, understood that a long struggle lay ahead if a social change deeper than merely establishing a "first" was going to be brought about; heroism wasn't quite the point. Another vision that older fans still hold is of Robinson's brief, honorary appearance at the World Series of 1972—half the distance to the present celebrations—when, frail and white-haired at fifty-three, he stood behind a microphone at home plate and said that what would really please him now would be to see the first black manager working down behind third base somewhere. Nine days later, Jackie Robinson was dead.

The pastime has gained some critical ground since then. Racial tensions in the clubhouse and on the field are largely invisible. Minority players have moved up

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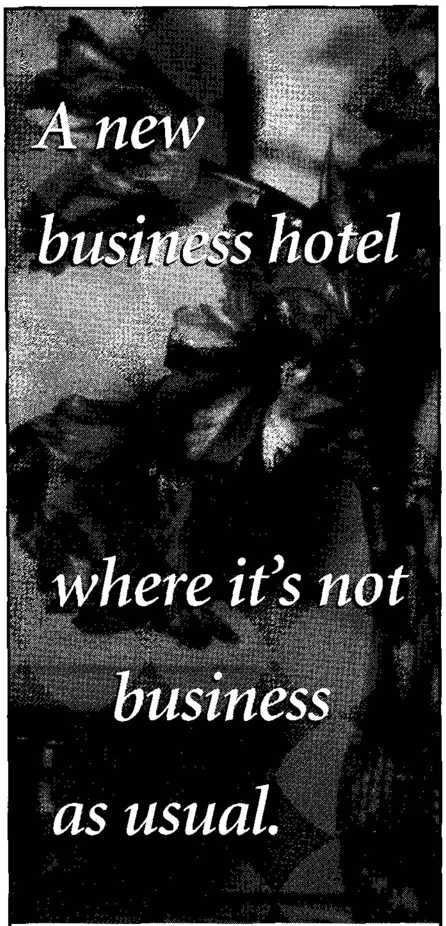

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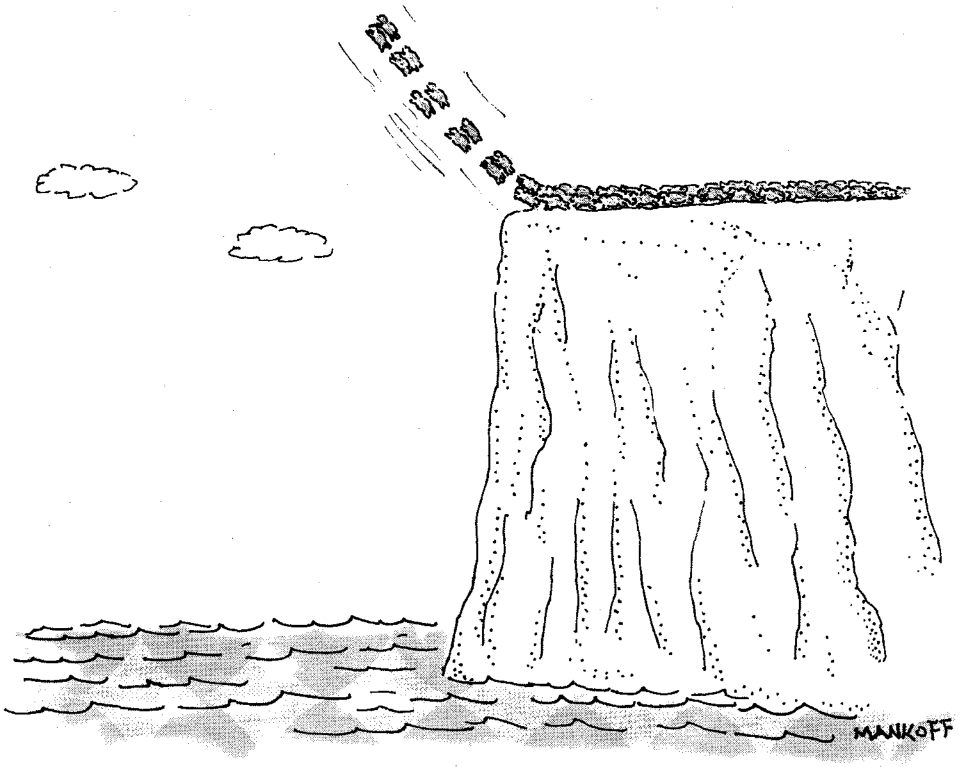


WHAT LEMMINGS BELIEVE

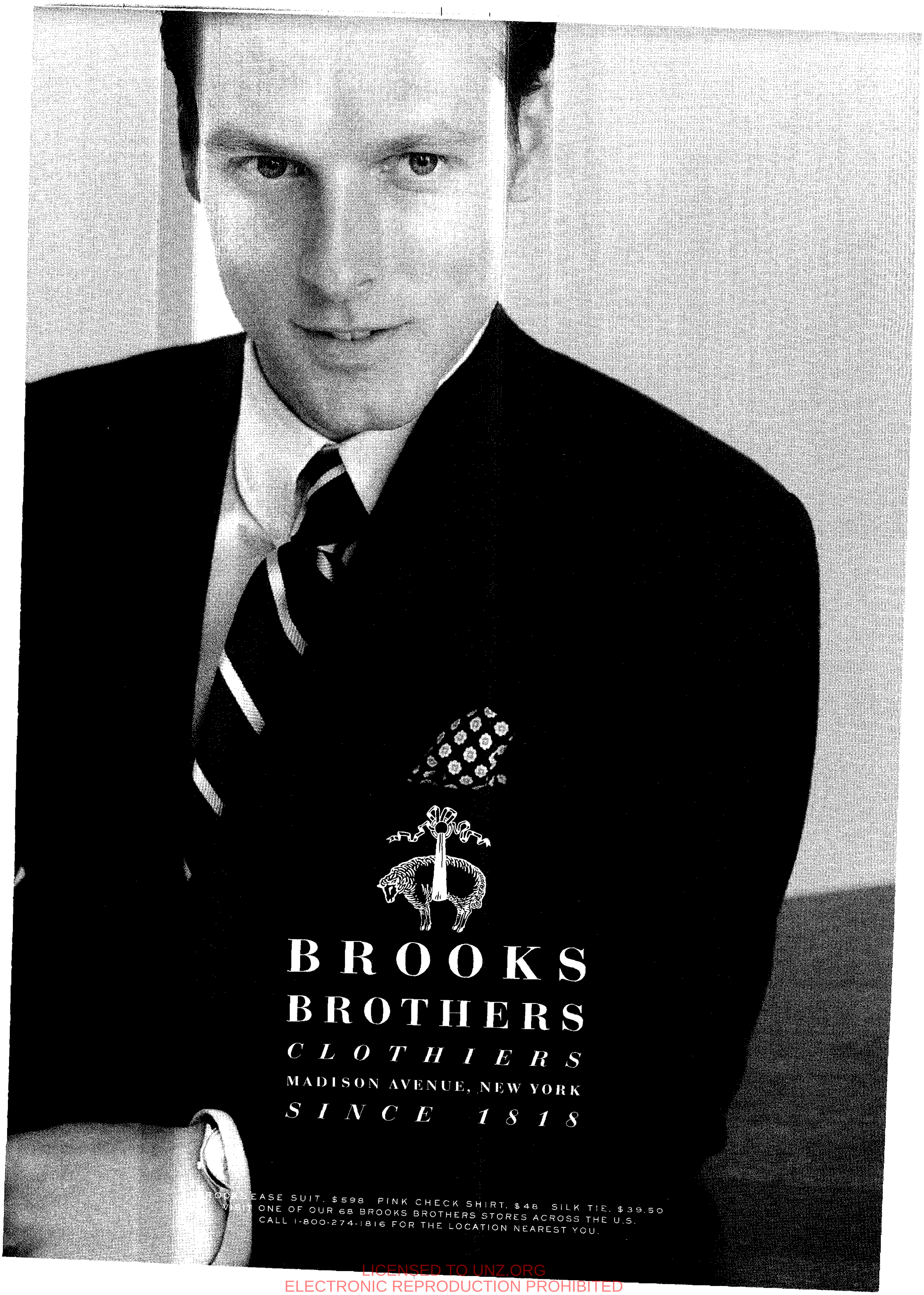
in the game, occupying levels of celebrity and affluence that would have been incomprehensible to players and fans of the forties. The willingness of stars like Barry Bonds and Albert Belle to make themselves intensely disliked by the media and most of the fans is an unmistakable, if irritating, sign of interracial cool. The president of the National League, Leonard Coleman, is an African-American. And black and Latino managers—there are four of them at present—are no longer news. Hooray for us—but hold on a minute. Here's one of the four, Don Baylor, skipper of the Colorado Rockies, talking just last month about the planned Jackie Robinson commemorations: "This is a whitewash—it's only going to happen for this year. We've gone from rapid pace to snail. Since Bart Giamatti's death and [the departure of] Fay Vincent, it's gone back again, right to the back of the room. There's a way that the lack of progress can be camouflaged. It's kind of frustrating."

The camouflaging may be inadvertent, or perhaps only embarrassed. Under its four-year-old Equal Opportunity Committee, Major League Baseball has seen minority employment in its league and club front offices pick up considerably: on-the-field minority employment—managers, coaches, scouts, and trainers—is at twenty-two per cent. But at the higher levels the gains become spotty or meaningless, and whenever this is brought up spokesmen for baseball begin to edge out of the room. Not a single baseball owner appeared at an ESPN panel discussion, "Sport in Black and White," conducted by Ted Koppel last February, perhaps because so many of them recalled the infamous moment, ten years ago, when Al Campanis, a Dodger vice-president, told Koppel (on "Nightline") that blacks lacked "the necessities" to become managers or front-office executives—a scandal that actually brought about an immediate jump in minority employment right across the baseball spectrum.

What discourages Don Baylor and his compeers is that significant minority hirings aren't as significant as they first appear. Four years ago, Bob Watson became the first African-American general manager in baseball when he was hired by the Houston Astros; he is now with the World Champion Yankees, but he remains the only one. Nine managers put on new uniforms over the past year; all of them are white non-Latinos, and all but two have managed another major-league club in the recent past. (Given the swiftly rising numbers of Latino players and stars—Andres Galarraga, Roberto Alomar, the American League M.V.P. Juan Gonzalez, the coming superstar Alex Rodriguez, et al.—the presence of Felipe Alou, of the Expos, as the only Latino skipper is a renewable year-by-year shock.) Four minority managers among today's twenty-eight big-league clubs comes out at fourteen per cent—not bad, perhaps, unless we look at the bigger picture. Over the twenty-two years since Frank Robinson fulfilled Jackie Robinson's hopes by becoming the first black manager, there have been two hundred and thirty-four managerial hirings in the show. (Two of them were Frank Robinson himself, back with different clubs.) Ten of those hired were minority members: less than five per cent.

A pattern of this kind is nothing like the storm of hate that Jackie Robinson faced; it comes out of repeated small decisions, made by executives anxious for success and uneasy about the skills and the character of men they haven't known nearly as well as their friends and familiars in the game. Experience counts for *everything* in baseball, it sometimes seems. Sandy Alderson, the highly regarded president of the Oakland Athletics, pointed out the other day that baseball is a quintessential small business, and that the rapid current turnover in team ownership tends to wipe out small, progressive steps that a few clubs may have been persuaded to try. The new owners, scared to death in an arena as wild and weird as baseball, always bring in their old friends for reassurance and advice: white friends.

This same pattern of minority impotence may be in force all across unstable corporate America, where black or Latino C.E.O.s and board members are also hard to find, but pointing this out should be of no comfort to baseball. Nor should it be taken as disparaging what was accomplished by Jackie Robinson's courage and class; if anything, it tells us something about the size and the lumpish, Jabba-the-Hutt immobility of racial prejudice in this country. What we can say is that baseball has changed, but not nearly enough; in too many ways, it's still the national pastime. —ROGER ANGELL

BROOKS
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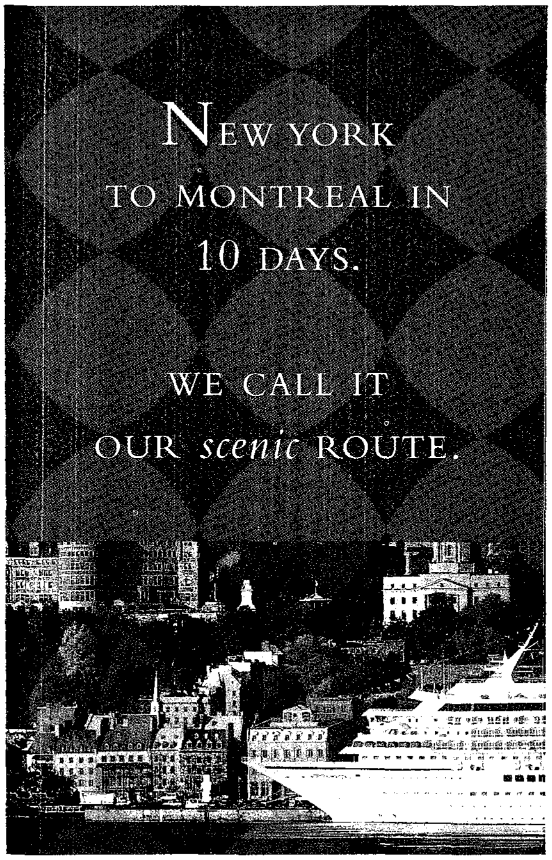

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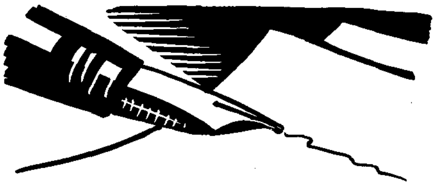

DATING THE SPHINX

Alexander Stille's article "Perils of the Sphinx" (February 10th) seriously misrepresents my geological investigations. My revised dating of the oldest portion of the Sphinx to circa 5000 B.C. or earlier is not based solely on erosion patterns. Four major lines of evidence were used: surface weathering features, data from seismic investigations, analysis of the construction of the "Sphinx" and "Valley" temples, and analysis of ancient campaigns to repair the Sphinx. (My research was published in *KMT: A Modern Journal of Ancient Egypt*, Summer 1992.) So far, the only explanation that adequately explains all of these data is the hypothesis of an older Sphinx.

In addition, contra Stille's assertions, and leaving aside the provocative astronomical and mythological evidence, there is a historical context for an older Sphinx. The massive stoneworks dating to before 5000 B.C. in Jericho, Palestine, are comparable to the type of stone carving used on the Sphinx (as I noted in the *KMT* article). Furthermore, predynastic trade and cultural exchange between Egypt and Palestine have been documented. For Stille to ignore such evidence is simply irresponsible.

ROBERT M. SCHOCH
Associate Professor of Science and Mathematics
College of General Studies, Boston University
Boston, Mass.

Alexander Stille replies:

I stand by my characterization of Professor Schoch's work in dating the Sphinx. The "four major lines of evidence" he cites are all facets of erosion. Many other scholars who know the monument and the Giza site far better than Schoch disagree strongly with his interpretation of the data. His theory is therefore hardly "the only explanation."

However, the most glaring defect in Schoch's theory is, as I wrote, that he completely fails to provide any historical context, something he fails to remedy in his letter. The comparison to Jericho is both specious and irrelevant. There are no colossal carved statues at Jericho; the building there was done with loose fieldstones and rubble—in no way comparable to the massive quarried stone blocks of Egypt. More to the point, evidence in Palestine is not evidence in Egypt. Carving a two-hundred-and-sixty-foot-long statue and two massive temples would have required a large workforce and a substantial human settlement. These would have left abundant remains of their presence. Indeed, they did, but the oldest human debris dates from the dynastic Egyptian civilization of the third millennium B.C., hence the traditional dating of the Sphinx to circa 2600 B.C. Schoch, by contrast, has yet to point to a single shard of archeological evidence at Giza dating from 5000 B.C. or earlier. Without such proof, he cannot expect his "redating" of the Sphinx to be taken seriously.

SOUR NOTE

I am one of the many musicians who had played in the Paul Taylor orchestra since 1980 and were replaced this season (The Talk of the Town, "Facing the Music," by Arlene Croce, March 17th). My colleagues and I certainly understand that companies such as Taylor's have financial problems, and that there is a need for flexibility on the part of our union. But, contrary to Croce's assertion, union-scale wages have not been rising "steeply" for the last few years. Taylor calls this a moral issue, but what is the morality of replacing an entire orchestra for financial reasons without even attempting to discuss a compromise? Croce is quite right that "too often, the orchestra pit is dark." If major companies in major halls continue to cut musicians' wages by avoiding unions, not only will the pit be dark but the concert stages will be, too, because there will be no music profession if it is impossible for a musician to earn a living.

JON TAYLOR
New York City

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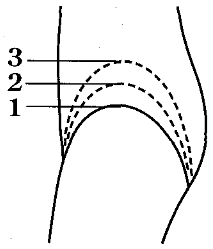

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THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.)

All My Sons—The Roundabout Theatre Company presents a fiftieth-anniversary production of Arthur Miller's drama. In previews. (Laura Pels, Broadway at 45th St. 869-8400.)

An American Daughter—Wendy Wasserstein's new play stars Kate Nelligan as a professor undergoing a Senate confirmation hearing for the post of Surgeon General. In previews through April 12. Opens April 13 at 6:45. (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

Bermuda Avenue Triangle—A comedy about two retirement-community widows who fall under the spell of a mysterious man. In previews. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 580-1313.)

Corn—A Ridiculous Theatrical Company revival of Charles Ludlam and Virgil Young's musical about the country-and-Western star Lola-Lola. In previews through April 13. Opens April 15 at 7. (Chelsea Playhouse, 125 W. 22nd St. 307-4100.)

The Gin Game—Charles Nelson Reilly directs Charles Durning and Julie Harris in D. L. Coburn's 1977 play. In previews. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

The Green Heart—Charles Busch (book) and Rusty Magee (music and lyrics) have joined forces on this comic thriller, a musical adaptation of Jack Ritchie's short story about a broke playboy with dark designs on a rich botanist. Opens April 9 at 8. (Variety Arts, Third Ave. at 14th St. 239-6200.)

Hate Mail—Bill Corbett and Kira Obolensky's new play traces the unfolding of an epistolary love-hate relationship. In previews. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 333-4052.)

The Invisible Man and **The Nightingale and Not the Lark**—Two one-acts by the Irish novelist and playwright Jennifer Johnston, starring WB Brydon and Paddy Croft, respectively. In previews through April 12. Opens April 13 at 7. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737.)

Jekyll & Hyde—Robin Phillips is the director of this musical based on Robert Louis Stevenson's tale of the two-faced physician. Book and lyrics by Leslie Bricusse; music by Frank Wildhorn. In previews. (Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

The Last Street Play—An urban drama, written in 1977 by Richard Wesley, starring Ella Joyce. In previews through April 12. Opens April 13 at 3. (Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 199 Chambers St. 346-8510.)

The Life—A new musical by Cy Coleman (music) and Ira Gasman (lyrics), set in Times Square in 1980. Michael Blakemore is the director. In previews. (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

The Little Foxes—Lillian Hellman's 1939 drama about an unscrupulous Southern family of industrialists. In previews. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

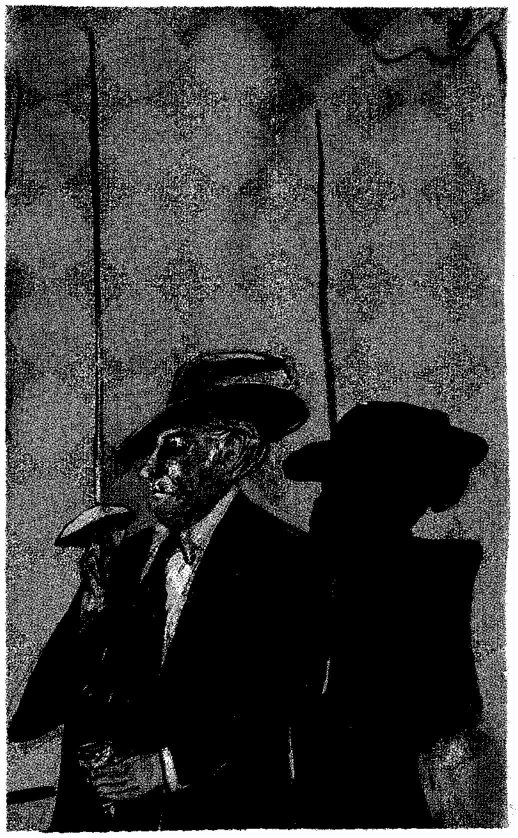
Steel Pier—John Kander wrote the music and Fred Ebb the lyrics for this romantic musical set in Atlantic City in 1933, during a dance marathon. Scott Ellis is the director. In previews. (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

Sympathetic Magic—From Lanford Wilson, a new drama about a couple caught on the horns of a dilemma. Directed by Marshall W. Mason. In previews. (Second Stage, Broadway at 76th St. 239-6200.)

Titanic—A new musical about the ill-fated ocean liner, directed by Richard Jones. Peter Stone wrote the book, Maury Yeston the lyrics and music. In previews. (Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

OPENED RECENTLY

Animal Instincts—In her new performance piece, Rae C. Wright examines our relationship to other species (and our desire to eat them). Thursdays through Saturdays, through April 19. (Dixon Place, 258 Bowery, near Houston St. 219-3088.)


Christopher Plummer, in William Luce's "Barrymore."

ROBERT ANDREW PARKER

Annie—Can the powerhouse waif who eludes the orphanage, wins the heart of Daddy Warbucks, and gives F.D.R. the idea for the New Deal find another bonanza in this twentieth-anniversary revival of her Broadway musical? With eight-year-old Brittny Kissinger wearing the red fright wig, anything is possible: no one ever went broke underestimating the intelligence of the New York public. With Nell Carter as Miss Hannigan and Conrad John Shuck as Daddy Warbucks. Directed by Martin Charnin, who also wrote the lyrics; book by Thomas Meehan, music by Charles Strouse. (Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Barrymore—Christopher Plummer's rich, unmiked voice hits every note of sarcasm and self-loathing in William Luce's rambunctious script (which is as good as one-man shows get), as he perfectly captures the grief behind the old ham's gallant frivolity. A big, juicy triumph, well directed by Gene Saks. (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Bunny Bunny—Playing no fewer than twenty-five bit parts, a new young actor named Alan Tudyk steals the show in this comedy by Alan Zweibel (one of the original "Saturday Night Live" writers) about his friendship with Gilda Radner, who died of cancer in 1989. Paula Cale and the excellent Bruno Kirby are likable as the leads, but Zweibel the author comes off, on occasion, as less than generous, giving Zweibel the character most of the best lines and making reference to Radner's bulimia over and over. Christopher Ashley directed. David Gallo's cartoony sets are a trip and a half. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 239-6200.)

Chicago—Walter Bobbie's bookless, setless revival of the 1975 Kander-Ebb-Fosse extravaganza of cynicism (choreographed this time around by Ann Reinking) is about a woman who gets away with murder. This razzle-dazzle concert posing as a full-dress musical may do the same. (Reviewed in our issue of 11/25/96.) (Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

Dealer's Choice—Manhattan Theatre Club presents Patrick Marber's comedy, set during a poker game in a London restaurant. Directed by John Tillinger. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

A Doll's House—The acclaimed West End production of Ibsen's drama, starring Janet McTeer as Nora. Anthony Page is the director. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

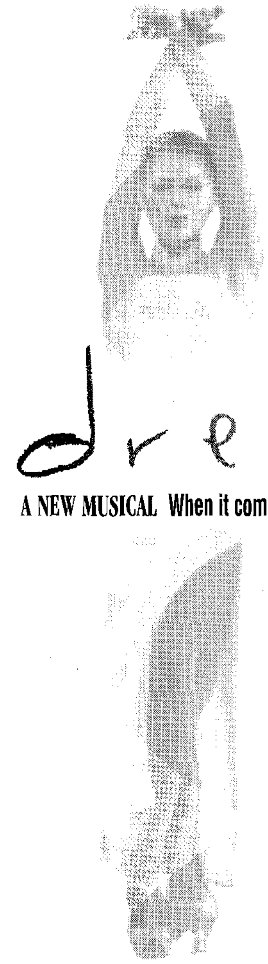
Dream—Lesley Ann Warren, John Pizzarelli, and Margaret Whiting lead the cast in a celebration of the songs of Johnny Mercer. Directed and choreographed by Wayne Cilento. (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Genesis—Actor and storyteller Max McLean presents a one-man show, a co-adaptation with Buzz McLaughlin of the first book of the Bible. (Lamb's, 130 W. 44th St. 997-1780.)

God's Heart—Joe Mantello is the director of a new play by Craig Lucas, about technology, loss, class divisions, and liberal guilt. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde—A new play written and directed by Moisés Kaufman. (Greenwich House Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 279-4200. Closes April 20.)

The Guardsman—The Hungarian-born playwright Ferenc Molnár's 1924 comedy, about the romantic machinations of a Viennese actor and



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starring
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Directed and
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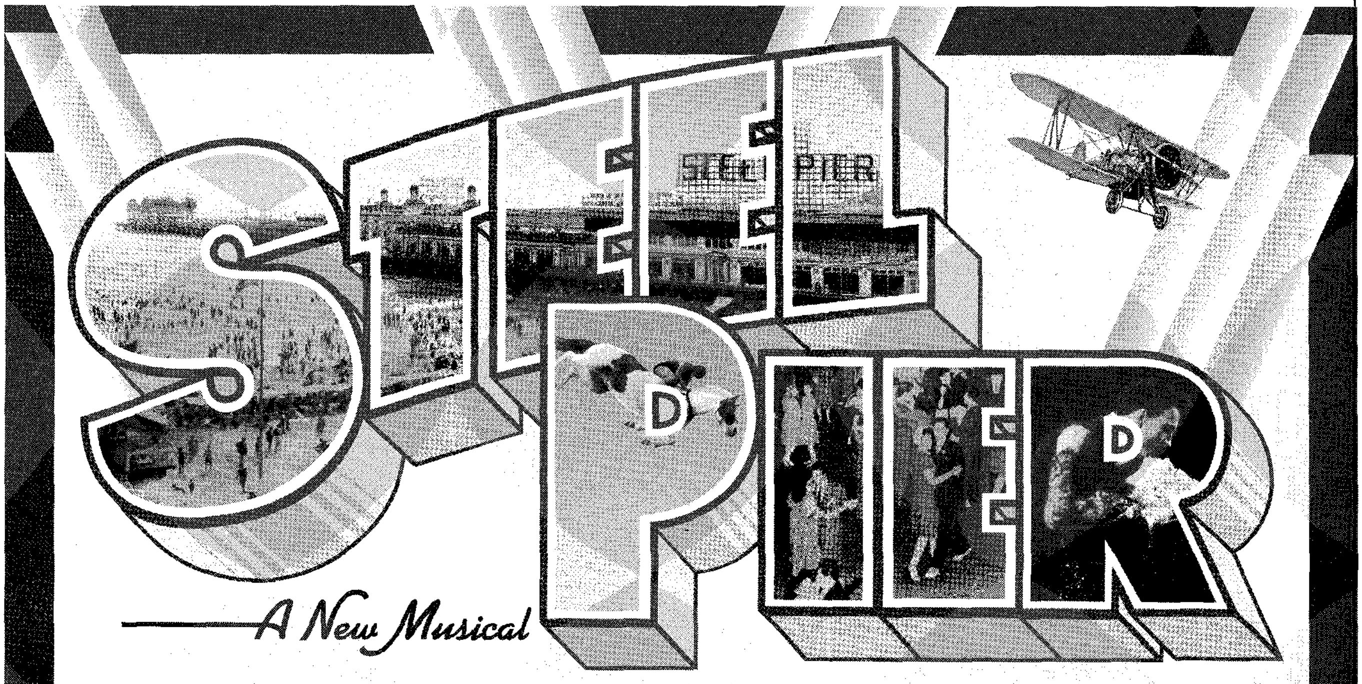
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his actress wife. Presented by the Pearl Theatre Company. (80 St. Marks Pl. 598-9802. Closes April 26.)

The Hairy Ape—A Wooster Group production of O'Neill's drama, starring Willem Dafoe, Kate Valk, and Peyton Smith. (Selwyn, 229 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

How I Learned to Drive—Paula Vogel's memory play, about a young woman (Mary-Louise Parker) who comes of age too quickly under the tutelage of her pedophile uncle (David Morse), is a clear-eyed marvel. Under the excellent direction of Mark Brokaw, both Ms. Parker and Mr. Morse give captivating, sympathetic performances, and the rest of the cast is exceptional, too. (Vineyard Theatre, 108 E. 15th St. 353-3874. Closes April 13.)

My Italy Story—A third-generation Italian from Hoboken (Daniel Mastrogiorgio) makes a trip to Naples to investigate the roots of a family rift, in a one-man show by Joseph Gallo. (47th Street Theatre, 304 W. 47th St. 265-1086.)

Once Upon a Mattress—That modern madcap Sarah Jessica Parker shines as the princess in Gerald Gutierrez's revival of Mary Rodgers's silly, marshmallowy 1959 musical, but she deserves a vehicle that, to paraphrase Jerome Kern, is not merely lovely to look at but delightful to know. (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

On House—The WPA Theatre presents Kevin Heelan's black comedy about corrupt hospital workers. (519 W. 23rd St. 206-0523. Closes April 13.)

years, and his warm, outsized presence and perennial professionalism make you grateful for his return. Daniel Sullivan directed. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Closes April 20.)

Stanley—Circle in the Square springs back to life with this triumphant mounting of the Royal National Theatre production of Pam Gems's play about the British artist Stanley Spencer (1891-1959). Antony Sher's portrayal of Spencer, whose narcissism knew no bounds, is prodigiously energetic and emotional. The play itself has its limitations (too much talk about the meaning of life and art), but Sher's performance doesn't. John Caird is the director. (3/10/97) (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200.)

"Wine-Blue-Open-Water," a modern take on the Odyssey, by the Gale Gates et al. company.

ISADORE SELTZER

A Huey P. Newton Story—Roger Guenveur Smith gives an outstanding performance in a one-man show that he assembled from interviews with and writings by the co-founder of the Black Panther Party. Jiggling his legs, chain-smoking, and talking ninety miles a minute, he offers a mesmerizing (and demystifying) hour and forty-five minutes. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200. Closes April 27.)

The Joy of Going Somewhere Definite—William H. Macy directs a comedy by Quincy Long, starring Guy Boyd, Jordan Lage, and J. R. Horne as three loggers who take a road trip to Canada. (Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 239-6200.)

The Last Night of Ballyhoo—In his new play, a romantic comedy of manners set in Atlanta (where he grew up) in 1939, Alfred Uhry stays true to a Southern sense of propriety: he takes on an unsavory topic (anti-Semitism among the Jewish upper crust) without dwelling on it long enough to offend anyone, and, like a practiced host, he shows you a good time without taxing you. Ron Lagomarsino directed. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 307-4100.)

The Last Sweet Days—Gretchen Cryer (book and lyrics) and Nancy Ford (music) have fused two of their earlier musicals—"Shelter" and "The Last Sweet Days of Isaac"—in a new work, about two people who begin a romance years after being trapped together in an elevator. A York Theatre Company staging. (Theatre at St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 935-5820.)

The Little Frieda Mysteries—The deliciously sick humor that Amy and David Sedaris have displayed in their previous plays ("Stitches," "One Woman Shoe") isn't as feverishly funny in this new one, although it does provide Ms. Sedaris with an opportunity to reprise, for a few moments, one of her trademark characters, a wildly toilet-tongued toughie. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 475-7710. Closes April 19.)

Men on the Verge of a His-Panic Breakdown—The Chilean-born playwright Guillermo Reyes's one-man show stars Felix A. Pire as a variety of gay Hispanic immigrants. (47th Street Theatre, 304 W. 47th St. 265-1086.)

Mollie Oil BETWIXT—A one-woman show by Peggy Pettitt, concerning color prejudices within the black community and the cultural importance of oral traditions. Thursdays through Sundays, through April 27. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288.)

Play On!—Twenty-three Duke Ellington songs strung out on a thread of plot from "Twelfth Night." The music is wonderful, of course, but the musical is not—it's a mutant production in which character is fiddled with to legitimize songs that were never written to illuminate character. Neither the show's book, by Cheryl L. West, nor its star, Cheryl Freeman, has much fun with the confusion of genders. Other talented performers generate a great deal of heat, but no warmth. Directed by Sheldon Epps, with choreography by Mercedes Ellington. (4/7/97) (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 307-4100.)

The Plough and the Stars—Sean O'Casey's take on the Easter Uprising of 1916, as seen from one Dublin tenement. The characters are less finely drawn here than in some of the playwright's other works, making the tragedy less inevitable but the comedy more fun. The director, Charlotte Moore, creates some moving moments—as when the Irish Citizen Army goes off to battle and a publican (the wonderfully understated Con Horgan) marches in his bar in silent accord—and she paces O'Casey's humor well. Louise Favier's obtuse, hysterical performance as a young wife abandoned for the cause is outweighed by Pauline Flanagan's vigor as a British sympathizer and Des Keogh's calm decency as the only man with the courage to talk back to the British soldiers. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737.)

Present Laughter—As the monumentally egotistical West End star Garry Essendine, Frank Langella keeps the core of Noël Coward's 1939 comedy of bad manners alive with a full-tilt assault on the character's outrageousness. Unfortunately, the director, Scott Elliott, seems to think that he's liberating Coward by turning the play into a bisexual romp. (11/25/96) (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

Psychopathia Sexualis—John Patrick Shanley's new comedy, about a man (Andrew McCarthy) who can't make love to his fiancée unless a pair of his father's argyle socks is within reach, is blessed with two wonderfully funny performances: Daniel Gerroll's, as a friend of the feckless fetishist, and Edward Herrmann's, as a hilariously inappropriate psychiatrist (he bangs a gavel on his desk to end sessions). Herrmann, the straw that has stirred many a theatrical drink, has been absent from the New York stage for several

Stonewall Jackson's House—Jonathan Reynolds's comedy, about a woman who pushes the racial envelope, hits all its targets—from multiculturalism to the misuses of history—with deadly aim, and the versatile cast is hilarious. (American Place, 111 W. 46th St. 239-6200. Closes April 27.)

Tap Dogs—Australia's work-booted tap troupe brings its North American tour to New York. (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.)

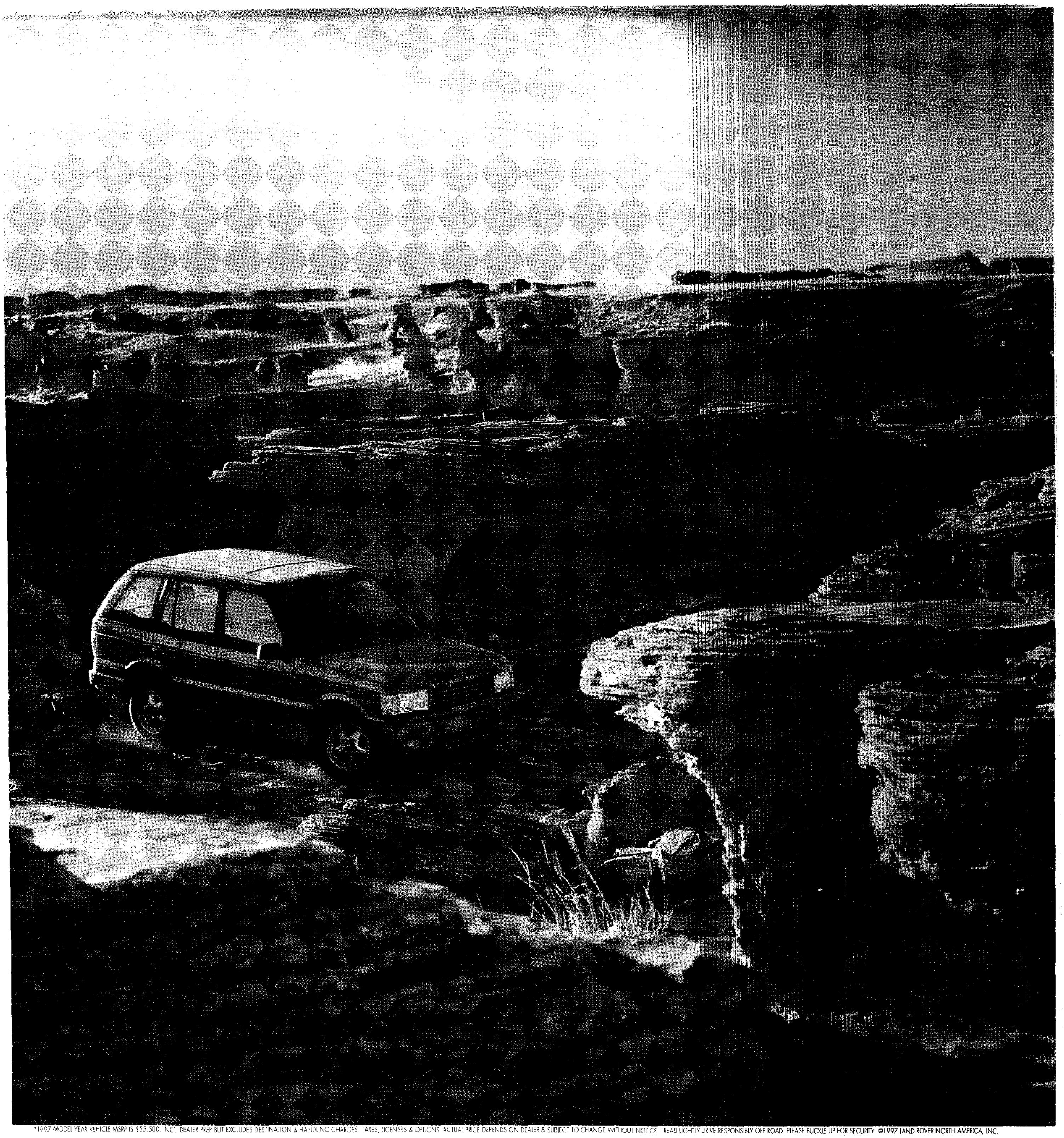
Terra Incognita—A sophomoric gloss, in the form of an "opera for the theatre," on the past five hundred years of interaction between the Old World and the New. Perhaps Maria Irene Fornes, who wrote and directed, hoped that the intensity of the singing would hide the banality of her libretto. The fine voices of the five-member cast and some charmingly funny moments only make her lack of new ideas more evident. (INTAR, 420 W. 42nd St. 695-6134. Closes April 13.)

Wine-Blue-Open-Water—A site-specific staging of Homer's Odyssey, by the Gale Gates et al. company. (67 Broad St., fifteenth floor. 269-7858.)

The Young Man from Atlanta—Rip Torn and Shirley Knight star in Horton Foote's 1995 drama, set in Houston in the nineteen-fifties, about a couple living in the aftermath of their only child's death. Robert Falls is the director. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

LONG RUNS

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST: Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4100. . . . **BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES:** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . . **BRING IN DA NOISE, BRING IN DA FUNK:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200. . . . **CATS:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . . **FORBIDDEN BROADWAY STRIKES BACK!:** Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 799-4599. . . . **FULL GALLOP:** Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200. . . . **A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM:** St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **GRANDMA SYLVIA'S FUNERAL:** SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 691-1555. . . . **HOWARD CRABTREE'S WHEN PIGS FLY:** Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. . . . **I LOVE YOU, YOU'RE PERFECT, NOW CHANGE:** Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200. . . . **JOSEPH GABRIEL: MAGIC ON BROADWAY:** Lamb's,



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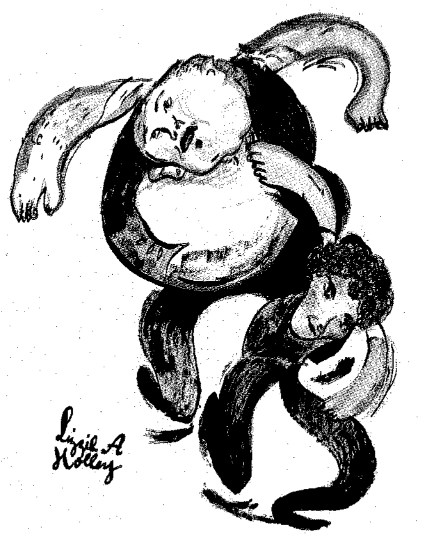
DANCE

"Do We Dare"—For Lawrence Goldhuber (six foot four, three hundred pounds) and Heidi Latsky (five feet even, a hundred pounds), the short answer is yes. Rehearsals for their first collaboration, "It's Not What You Think," began innocently enough, with the two former Bill T. Jones dancers agreeing to try some figure eights: walking, turning, waving their arms. But one thing led to another, and now, Goldhuber says, "I'm swooping Heidi"—his way of describing an aerobatic lift in which he navigates his airborne partner from the floor to the lights and back again. In another and perhaps more audacious work, "Too Much, Too Little, Too Bad!," Latsky performs in a costume with forty-foot arms; Goldhuber wears a fat suit that makes him look three hundred pounds heavier. "So when I take it off I *look thin*," Goldhuber says. "Everybody should have one." (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288. April 10-13 at 8:30.)



"Do We Dare," at P.S. 122.

Ballet Tech—Final performances of the season. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. April 9-11 at 8, April 12 at 2 and 8, and April 13 at noon and 4.)

Parsons Dance Company—The nine-member troupe intersperses performance and discussion in a program for families. (New Victory Theatre, 209 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. April 11 at 7, April 12 at 2 and 7, and April 13 at 3.)

"Primal Steps"—Former Merce Cunningham dancer Ellen Cornfield adds elements of the personal (touch, eye contact, visible pleasure) to her mentor's vocabulary of precarious tilts and abstract movement. (Danspace Project, St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. April 10-13 at 8:30.)

"Really Big Shows"—Safer & Secrest Dance-Circus combines acrobatics, slapstick, wrestle-grip partnering, and other big-top moves in "Max Schreck's Really Big Show," "Calamity," and "I Am Joe's Spleen." (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. April 10-12 at 8 and April 13 at 3.)

"A Potpourri of the Folk Dances of Taiwan"—The twenty-member Taipei Folk Dance Theatre presents a variety of styles, from traditional Chinese dances to martial-arts choreography. (Taipei Theatre, 1221 Sixth Ave., at 48th St. 373-1850. April 11-12 at 7:30 and April 13 at 2.)

"Freak-Boy Jones and the Mother Natures"—Ben Munisteri and his troupe perform works in progress. (Squid, 42 Ann St. 254-2542. April 11-12 at 8. Through April 19.)

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

Kenny Barron—Having spent the past few decades proving himself a consummate ensemble pianist, Barron here reminds us that he's no slouch without a band, either. A modern master, he may well be heir to Tommy Flanagan's throne. (Jazz Performance Space, New School, 55 W. 13th St. 229-5488. April 11 at 6:30.)

Deborah Gibson—The Artist Formerly Known as Debbie. (Westbury Music Fair. 516-334-0800. April 11 at 8.)

"Sisters of the Sixties"—A program of girl-group hits, featuring Darlene Love, Lesley Gore, Beverly Lee (of the Shirelles), Mary Wilson, Vicki Sue Robinson, and others. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824. April 11 at 8.)

Celine Dion—Since her treacly 1990 début, "Unison," this French-Canadian singer has become the queen of film soundtracks: the title song from "Beauty and the Beast," "When I Fall in Love" (from "Sleepless in Seattle"), and "Because You Loved Me" (from "Up Close & Personal") have all been monster hits. Her latest record, "Falling Into You," has now sold more than eight million copies and spent fifty-four weeks on the charts. In all fairness, she has a supple voice, but most of the time it's buried in pop bombast. (Madison Square Garden. 307-7171. April 12 at 8.)

Jay Black & the Americans—Sixties chart-toppers. (Westbury Music Fair. April 12 at 8.)

John Mellencamp—The Jeff Bridges of rock stars: he's instantly recognizable, consistently solid, and often inspired, but too much the regular guy to generate the larger-than-life mystique required of an icon. And, like Bridges, he has let his work speak for itself. The modest radiance of his heartland rock is now being echoed by a number of young bands, like Wilco and Son Volt, that grew up on "Jack and Diane" and "Pink Houses." The singer-songwriter's current album, "Mr. Happy Go Lucky," is particularly lean and mean, and his live shows always rock. (Theatre at Madison Square Garden. 307-7171. April 12-15 at 8.)

Bush / Veruca Salt—Because it traffics in grunge lite and has a pinup for a front man, Bush has been ridiculed by the American press and ignored in its native England. But "Sixteen Stone," the band's début album, sold more than four million copies and scored five hit singles. Its less impressive follow-up is entitled "Razorblade Suitcase." / Thanks to a great single called "Seether," this Chicago-based coed combo was once perceived to be on the cusp of major stardom. Things haven't quite worked out that way, but its new album, "Eight Arms to Hold You," is a fine box of heavy-metal candy. (Continental Airlines Arena, the Meadowlands. 212-307-7171. April 13 at 7:30. . . . ¶ Madison Square Garden. April 14 at 7:30.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

(A highly arbitrary listing, in which boldface type indicates some of the more notable performers in town. Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it is always advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

Algonquin Hotel, 59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—**WESLIA WHITFIELD** is at work in the Oak Room through May 3. Dining.

Birdland, 315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—The legendary club has a new address and bigger digs. April 8: If you've followed the career of the brilliant saxophonist Joe Lovano, you also know who **JUDI SILVANO** is. Popping up regularly on her husband's recordings, this eager soprano adds an unexpected tonal flavor that is not to everyone's taste. Fortunately, though, she's no preening traditionalist; if she errs, it's on the side of unbalanced experimentation. Showcasing her recent disk, "Vocalise," Silvano will have Lovano along as insurance. April 9-10: The **EDDIE DANIELS** quintet. Daniels took the plunge years ago, setting aside his saxophones in order to concentrate on the clarinet. A brave move, considering how unfashionable the instrument was, but one that's paid off now that the little horn that could is coming back to the fore. Gorgeous sounds emanate from Daniels's instrument. The presence here of lite-jazz keyboardist Bob James may precipitate sugar-shock attacks. The **BILLY HARPER** quintet is here April 11-13. Dining.

Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Jazz, mirrors, and a gift shop. Through April 13: The **ELVIN JONES REUNION BAND.** Jones is more octopus than man, a brilliant drummer who produces multi-rhythmic currents that seem beyond the scope of the four-limbed. In the thirty years since he parted company with John Coltrane and began leading his own fiercely swinging outfits, he has seen some first-rate talent pass through his bands' ranks. **FRANK FOSTER** and **SONNY FORTUNE**—two of the more bruising and intrepid saxophonists to face down Jones's percussive tornado—are on hand, along with trombonist **DELFAYO MARSALIS,** a recent alumnus. Starting April 15: The **MC COY TYNER** big band. Dining.

Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound pastel murals, and, through May 3, **BARBARA COOK,** in a tribute to Oscar Hammerstein II. In the glowing autumn of the singer's career, interpretive flair has overtaken vocal splendor. Her new Hammerstein recording (just released by DRG) boasts a few tracks nobody should miss, including a wistful rendition of "This Nearly Was Mine" and a film-noir reading of "The Gentleman Is a Dope." . . . ¶ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, pianist **PETER MINTUN** is in charge.

Iridium, 44 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through April 13: **CLARK TERRY AND THE HARRY (SWEETS) EDISON ALL-STARS.** Opposites attract. Terry needs both trumpet and flugelhorn to accommodate the torrent of notes which is always at the tip of his tongue; the overflow gets expressed in a spew of delightful vocal gibberish. Trumpeter Edison never met two notes he couldn't reduce to one, and even then he seems disturbed by the horn's profligacy. Both men are big-band veterans—Terry's an Ellingtonian, Edison a Basie-ite—and among the last exponents of a lyrical art whose secrets may pass with them. From April 15: Soprano saxophonist George Howard. Mondays belong to national treasure **LES PAUL.** Dining.

Knickerbocker, 33 University Pl., at 9th St. (228-8490)—Brass rails, vintage posters, Hirschfeld drawings, and a piano. April 9-12: **MULGREW MILLER** (piano) and **RICHIE GOOD** (bass).

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—April 8-12: **JOHN LURIE AND THE LOUNGE LIZARDS.** April 13: The big men of the big horn, including **HOWARD JOHNSON, BOB STEWART,** and **MARCUS ROJAS,** convene as the **NEW YORK TUBA EXPERIENCE.** In this tribute to the unsung heroes of modern jazz's bottom end—Bill Barber, Don Butterfield, Ray Draper, and others—the huffing and puffing horn ought to sing. April 14: Trumpeter **MAC GOLLEHON** and his band, Smokin' Section, which features trumpeter **LESTER BOWIE,** bassist **ALEX BLAKE,** and drummer **TOMMY CAMPBELL.**

Maxim's, 680 Madison Ave., at 61st St. (751-5111)—A mock-nineteenth-century bistro with stained glass, bevelled mirrors, and inlaid ceilings. Vocalist **GLORIA LYNNE** has the stage April 10-12. **JUDY BARNETT** and her septet come in on April 13. Dining.

Rainbow & Stars, 30 Rockefeller Plaza (632-5000)—The great cabaret in the sky. Chameleonic soprano **KT SULLIVAN** is in through April 12, with her tribute "Ladies of the Silver Screen."

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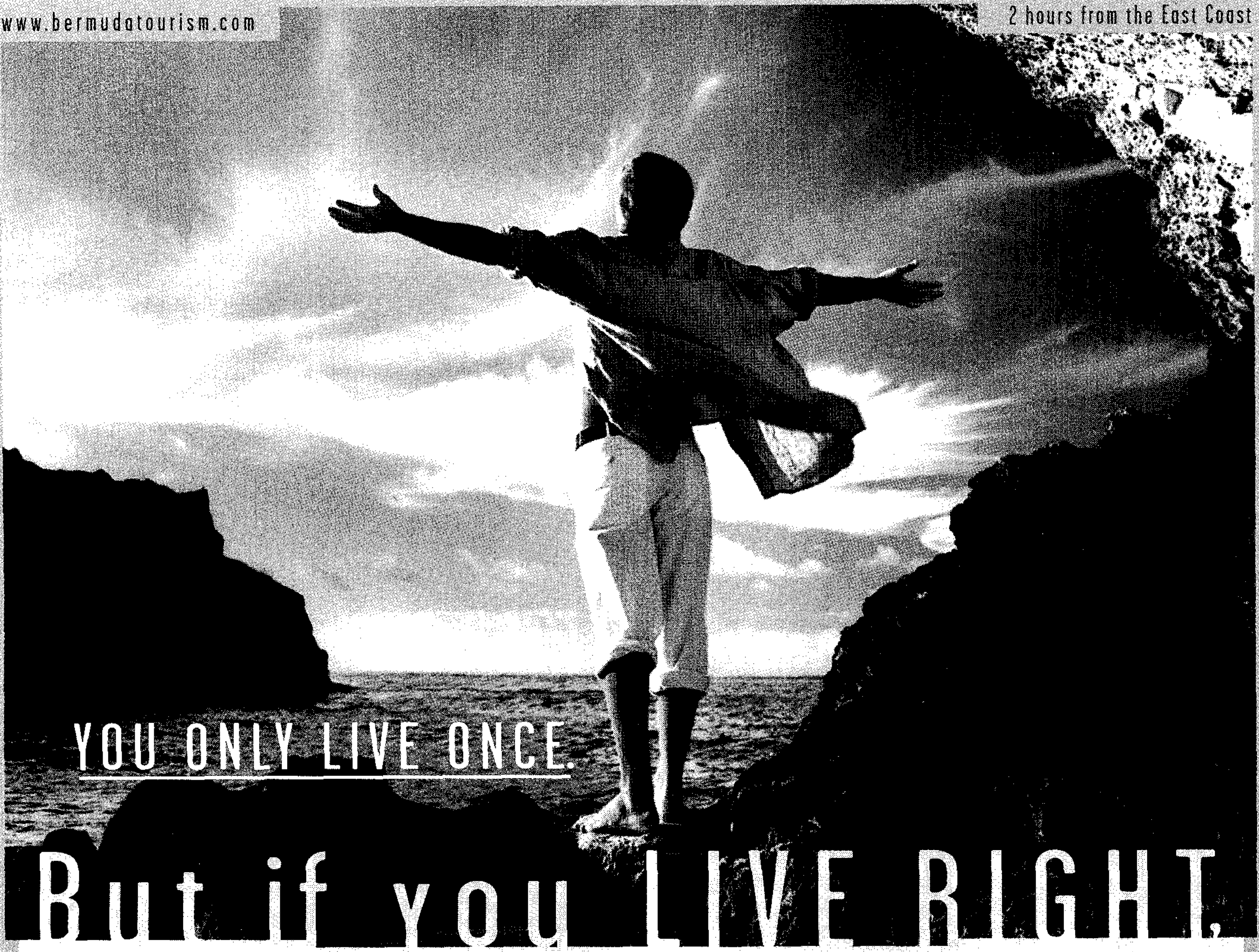
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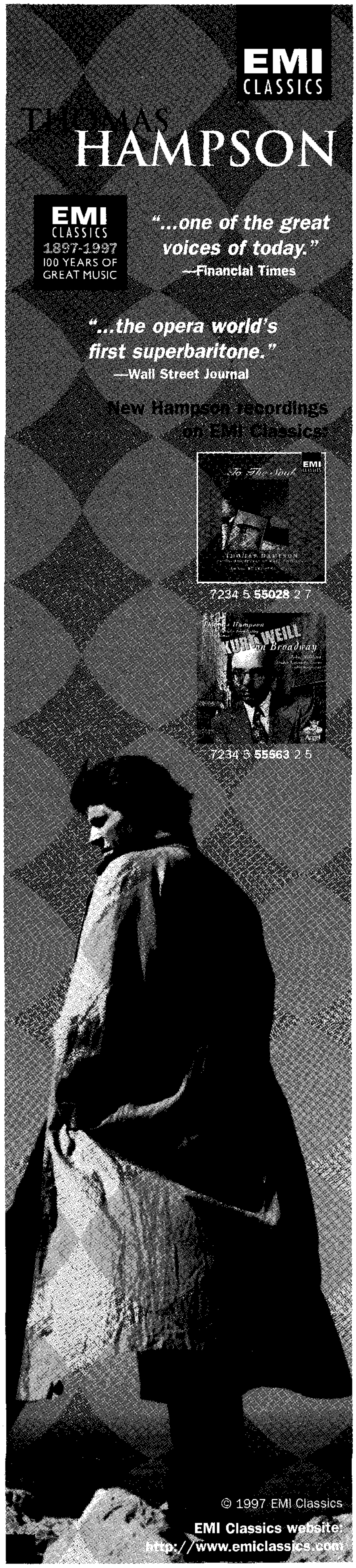


April 13: Calypso composer **IRVING BURGIE**—"Banana Boat Song (Day-O)," "Jamaica Farewell"—gives a rare performance. Statuesque chanteuse **KAREN AKERS** arrives April 15. Closed Mondays.

Smalls, 183 W. 10th St. (929-7565)—This aptly named club features up-and-coming players jamming late into the night. The **AVISHAI COHEN** quartet has the stage April 9-10. The **CARLOS GARNETT** quintet takes over April 11-12. Stocked to the gills with exciting new players, the **JASON LINDNER BIG BAND** holds court every Monday.

Sweet Basil, 88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—A jazz outpost where the musicians are always top-shelf. Through April 13: **CRAIG HANDY** is among the best of the new musicians loosening the stranglehold that Coltrane has exerted on tenor saxophonists these last four decades. He knows how to luxuriate in a note, turning whole phrases into mini rhapsodies—he takes his time and enhances ours. From April 15: The **JANE IRA BLOOM** quartet. Dining.

Tramps, 51 W. 21st St. (727-7788)—April 12: With tenor titan **SONNY ROLLINS,** you pays your money and you takes your chances. When the planets are aligned, he easily proves he's the most commanding improviser in jazz; when the cosmic balance is off, he is, too, and few experiences can be so frustrating. Yet he's still not to be missed, particularly in a club, where his very tone—massive and assured no matter what it's used for—can be a revelation.

Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through April 13: The **DAVÍD SANCHEZ** quintet. Starting April 15: **WESSELL ANDERSON,** the alto saxophonist in Wynton Marsalis's late, lamented septet, brings in his own quintet. The **VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA** holds sway on Mondays.

Visiones, 125 Macdougal St., at W. 3rd St. (673-5576)—A tiny, low-key supper club where the jazz, like the Spanish-American cuisine, can take on a spicy, multicultural flavor. April 9-12: The **BILL STEWART** quartet. Maturing before our eyes, drummer Stewart has finally come into his own with his new recording, "Telepathy." His composing still lacks flair (a detriment endemic to virtually all young lions), but he has evolved into a loose, instinctive player, one of the rare first-rate soloists, and a canny bandleader. He's in for the long haul. April 13: There's an almost sensual pleasure in watching great drummers like **VICTOR LEWIS.** Every move is smooth, perfectly balanced, and seemingly effortless. For the sublime lift he brings to a bandstand, Lewis's bandmates should pay him.

Zinno, 126 W. 13th St. (924-5182)—April 7-12: Guitarist **JACK WILKINS,** pianist **DEREK SMITH,** and bassist **STEVE LA SPINA** make chamber jazz that never loses its rhythmic spin. A drummer, rest assured, will not be missed. Dining.

ROCK, ETC.

Bottom Line, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—April 11: **DFA,** an ensemble consisting of Rick Danko, Jonas Fjeld, and Eric Andersen. April 13-14: The **JOHNNY WINTER** band.

Brownies, 169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (420-8392)—**ELLIOTT SMITH** (April 13-14) is an ascending singer-songwriter in the bleak-and-beautiful mold.

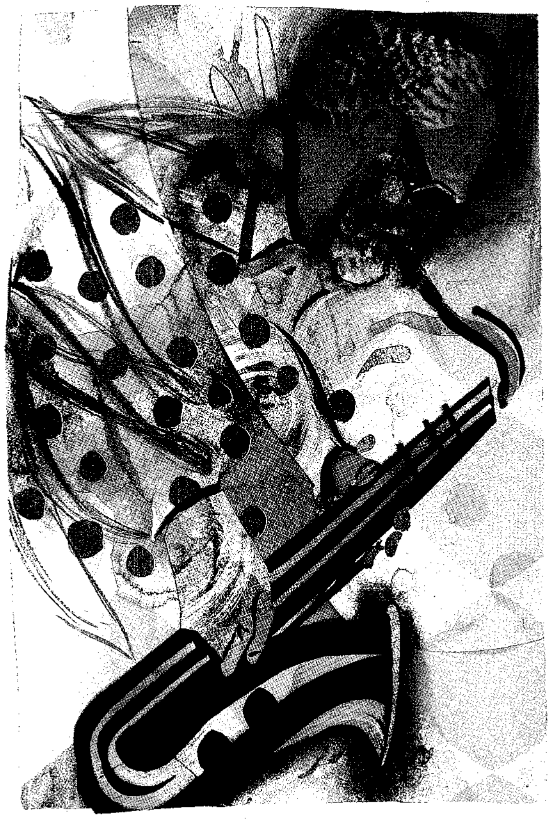
CBGB & OMFUG, 315 Bowery, at Bleecker St. (982-4052)—Rock and roll always sounds best in a dump, which may be why this legendary club is still thriving. April 9: The grinding intensity of **UNSANE.** April 11: **SLEEPYHEAD** makes airy, intelligent pop, and **ANTIETAM** (which recorded "Antietam Comes Alive!" here in 1992) rocks the indie house. April 12: The **WIVES.**

Chicago B.L.U.E.S., 73 Eighth Ave., at 13th St. (924-9755)—Dedicated to the music of the Windy City. April 11-12: Back in the fifties, when he was known as Guitar Junior, the Louisiana-born **LONNIE BROOKS** found two mentors in zydeco legend Clifton Chenier and soul pioneer Sam Cooke; you can hear them both in the celebratory style that's been his trademark ever since. His latest album, "Roadhouse Blues," is one of his best.

Coney Island High, 15 St. Marks Pl. (674-7959)—April 11: Fashion-friendly British rock with **FLUFFY.**

Irving Plaza, 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—April 10-12: In a more perfect world, all putatively great bar bands would live up to their hype as gamely as the **RADIATORS** do. Shored up by Ed Volker's hearty singing and boogie-driven keyboard riffs, this New Orleans-based group delivers its bluesy rock with all the radiant gusto you could ask for. April 14: In the early sixties, his staccato, tremolo-ridden guitar leads made **DICK DALE** a founding father of surf rock, and he recorded such masterpieces of the genre as "Miserlou" and "Let's Go Trippin'." He spent most of the seventies as a nostalgia act and a real-estate investor, but things really hit bottom in the eighties, when he went through a bitter divorce and, in a freak accident, suffered second-degree burns over much of his body, including his left hand. These days, Dale has remarried, released three new albums, and continues to enjoy his "Pulp Fiction" cachet. Surf's up. April 15: The **SAMPLES.**

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—April 15: Disturbing, murky, dissonant yet tuneful, infantile, and wise: all of these describe "Excerpts from a Love Circus," the second solo album by **LISA GERMANO,** the former violinist for John Mellencamp. (There's no trace of her old boss here.) The record has also been characterized as Appalachia meets Oz—a pretty fair indication of where she's coming from. Germano has an eerie non-voice, and when she sings "What is Victoria's Secret?" or "You're not my Yoko Ono" she sounds like a Lolita weaned on comic books and the Cabala.



Sonny Rollins, at Tramps.

DAVID TOUB

Mercury Lounge, 217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—April 9: **ART ALEXAKIS,** Everclear's bleached-blond lead singer gives a solo acoustic performance. April 10: **NUNO,** who was Nuno Bettencourt when he was with Extreme. April 12: The new rock outfit **BUICK MAC KANE** features guitarist **ALEJANDRO ESCOVEDO.**

S.O.B.'s, 204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (243-4940)—A great grass hut with a fruit-and-bamboo motif, dedicated to calypso, reggae, and the bossa nova. April 9: North African funk artist **HASSAN HAKMOUN** shares the stage with ambient disk jockey and *Paper* magazine columnist **D.J. SPOOKY.** April 11: **AZA,** featuring former Living Colour drummer **WILL CALHOUN** and legendarily funky Parliament and Talking Heads keyboardist **BERNIE WORRELL.** April 14: Son Reinas, a ten-piece all-female salsa band from Japan. Dining.

Supper Club, 240 W. 47th St. (921-1940)—April 13-14: Seventeen-year-old piano goddess **FIONA APPLE** headlines a bill with **MORCHEEBA,** a spooky trip-hop collective from London whose album "Who Can You Trust?" was one of last year's best-kept secrets.

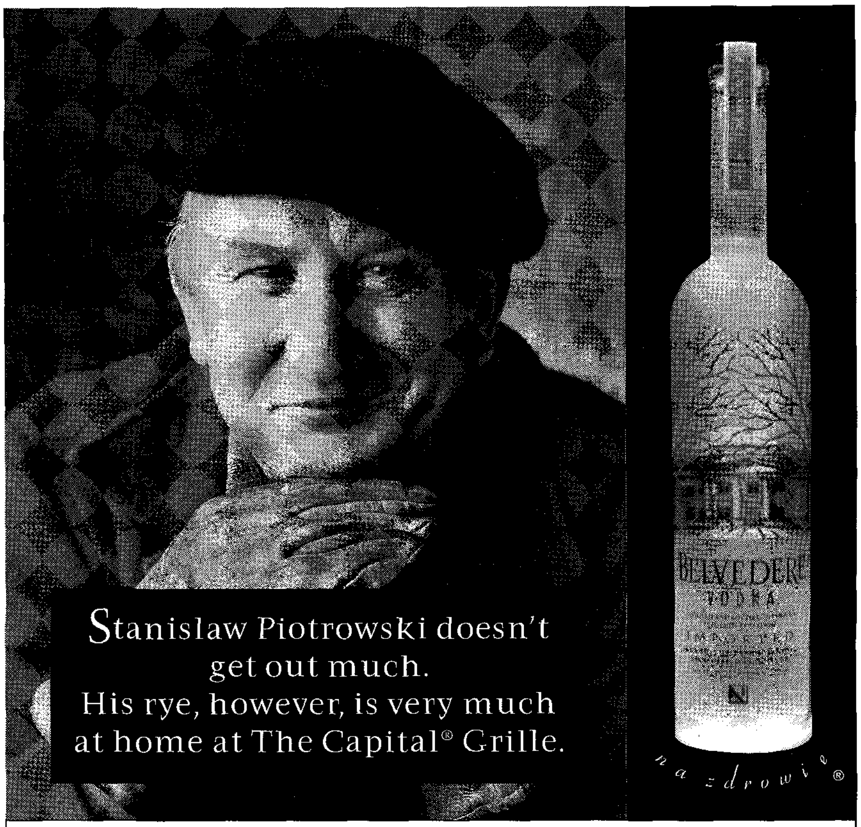
Tramps, 51 W. 21st St. (727-7788)—April 11: An evening of swamp-flavored funk with **LITTLE BUSTER AND THE SOUL BROTHERS** and **NATHAN AND THE ZYDECO CHA CHAS.**

Wetlands, 161 Hudson St. (966-4225)—April 9: Freestyle jazz, poetry, and hip-hop with the **LAST POETS,** featuring Abiodun Obeyole and Umar Bin Hassan, two of the group's original members. April 10: The ferocious, combat-booted rock of **SKUNK ANANSIE,** a London quartet fronted by Skin, who every so often shaves her head and paints a white stripe down the middle.

ONLY CONNECT

The Advertising Parody (http://www.dnai.com/sharrow/parody.html)—While most people in advertising assuage their feelings of self-loathing with large piles of cash, the folks at Sharrow Davies Townsend, a San Francisco-based "strategic planning and marketing consulting firm," administer their own therapy and provide a useful public service on this welcome site. The Advertising Parody whets your appetite for their takeoffs by linking to "*Ad Age's* 50 Best Commercials" (in itself a morning's diversion) and then hits you with several dozen easily loaded ads—some real, some satirical, and some hard to tell. Although the image of suicidal Benson & Hedges smokers perched on the Statue of Liberty's crown was a real ad, seeing it here makes you wonder what that agency was thinking. And the "Gag" ad, featuring a comely young woman in a plaid skirt and kneesocks, could pass for genuine Gap were it not for the tag line: "When you know you have bad taste."

The site encourages visitors to submit their own parodies and ludicrous ads. Contributors often provide the original along with the sendup: the unfillable boots of the Marlboro Man are here filled with a skeleton's legs above the legend "He died with his boots on." You'll also find the Absolut vodka parodies—a noose in the shape of an Absolut bottle ("Absolute Hangover"), the tagged toe of a D.O.A. drinker ("Absolute on Ice")—whose perpetrators were threatened with lawsuits. And a brief history of sex in advertising features the obligatory breast and crotch shots above the admonition "Look, but don't touch." If you can't resist (difficult, when that pointer becomes a little hand), you're sent to a reprimand page, which informs you that your name is now on various porn mailing lists and that your employer and your third-grade teacher have been notified.



Stanislaw Piotrowski doesn't get out much.
His rye, however, is very much at home at The Capital® Grille.

Belvedere Vodka. Crafted from 100% Polish rye and distilled 4 times for a cool, complex character and creamy smoothness.

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The new Bose® Acoustic Wave® music system is quite advanced.

The new Bose Acoustic Wave® music system features improved sound and this handy remote. So now you can control room-filling sound from your favorite chair — sound so rich and full, you'll understand why, when the system was first introduced, *Stereo Review* called it "...possibly the best reproduced sound many people have ever heard." The new system measures less than a foot tall and has an AM/FM radio, a CD player, and our patented acoustic waveguide technology. And it's available directly from Bose. So call today to learn about our in-home trial and satisfaction guarantee. And control award-winning sound technology from the palm of your hand.

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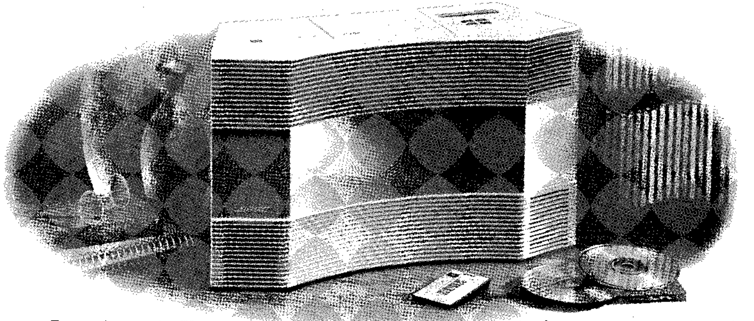
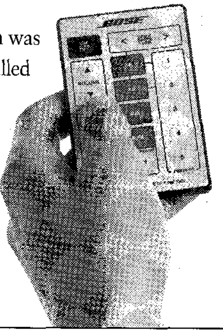




ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—"Cartier: 1900-1939" follows the development of the jewelry house (which opened in 1847) under Louis Cartier, who brought Art Deco grace to the design of pendants and brooches, watches and necklaces. Through Aug. 3. . . . ¶ In "The Four Seasons," the Costume Institute charts changes in seasonal fashion, highlighting materials from eiderdown to spandex. Through Aug. 17. . . . ¶ "The Glory of Byzantium" is the museum's most spectacular exhibition in years, a colossal exploration of the art, history, and thought of what is known as the Second Golden Age of Byzantium, an era of unsurpassed imperial opulence which lasted from the mid-ninth century to the thirteenth. Through July 6. . . . ¶ "Giambattista Tiepolo." This ravishing assembly—more than sixty works, mostly paintings—strongly suggests that the eighteenth-century Venetian master, a pivot between the baroque and the rococo, is due for a fin-de-siècle reëvaluation. Through April 27. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:15, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—In an age of digital art, the humble collage can seem deceptively tame. Yet "The Photomontages of Hannah Höch" proves that the artist's imagination needs nothing more than scissors and a pot of glue—and stacks of newspapers and magazines. Through May 20. . . . ¶ "Willem de Kooning: The Late Paintings, the 1980s." Forty examples from the Abstract Expressionist's final working decade. Through April 29. . . . ¶ "Manuel Alvarez Bravo." The great Mexican photographer's career spans eight decades; this retrospective visits all of them and includes rare platinum prints he made in the sixties from earlier negatives. Through May 18. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, 11 to 6; Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 8:30.)

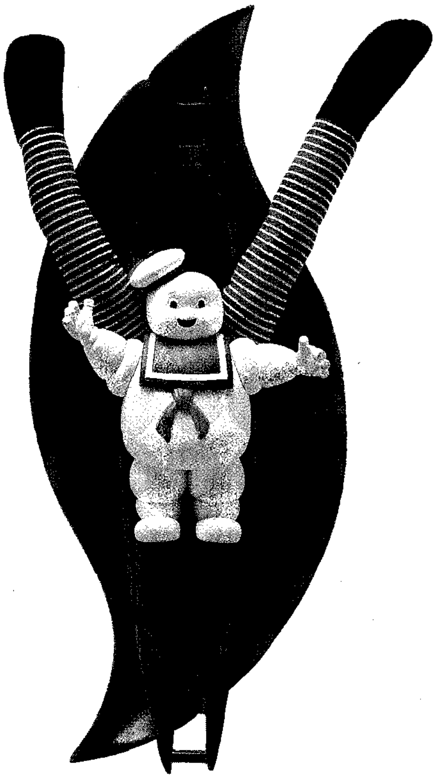
Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—"A Century of Sculpture: The Nasher Collection" features work by Brancusi, Giacometti, Matisse, Smith, and other twentieth-century artists. Through June 1. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 10 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 10 to 8.)

Guggenheim Museum SoHo, 575 Broadway, at Prince St. (423-3500)—"Art/Fashion" presents garments and other piecework designed by visual artists. Through June 8. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Saturday evenings until 8.)

Whitney Museum of American Art, Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—Clearly, the curators of the 1997 Biennial exhibition, Lisa Phillips and Louise Neri, have determined not to make the same mistakes as their immediate predecessors. In contradistinction to the haranguing 1993 show, with its noisy emphasis on identity politics, they have stressed a more poetic (or more palatable?) approach to social issues—e.g., Wendy Ewald's photographs (which attempt to depict the dreams of underprivileged children) and Shazia Sikander's updated Persian miniatures (which investigate, for example, the place of women in a traditional society); the downside is that political engagement of any kind gets lost. And these curators propound a more sharply delineated vision than the old-hat eclecticism of the 1995 show. This Biennial is, on the whole, hipper and smarter. The emphasis is on theatrical installations, many with pronounced son-et-lumière effects. Beginning, on the fourth floor, with Glen Seator's extraordinary scale model of the Whitney director's office, tilted at a forty-five-degree angle, and working your way down, you are treated to numerous pieces that challenge your relation to the surrounding space. The show isn't interactive; rather, it acts upon you, either aggressively, as in Paul McCarthy's lobby installation, with its deranged and filthy Santa Claus, or, more often, hypnotically, as in the projected-video installations of Bruce Nauman and Diana Thater. What the show lacks—and no doubt lacks deliberately—is any sense of clearly articulated argument. Through June 1. (Open Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

Brooklyn Museum of Art, Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—"From Pockets to Pouches: Three Centuries of Handbags." More than forty pieces from the museum's collection demonstrate the evolution of the purse, from Colonial-era gaming bags to the elaborately beaded inventions of Judith Leiber. Through June 22. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

China Institute, 125 E. 65th St. (744-8181)—"Adornment and Eternity: Status and Rank in Chinese Ornament" is a well chosen, informatively mounted exhibition that shows how, throughout China's history, the hat (or comb, or embroidery) really did proclaim the man. From the Tang dynasty on, a gold belt hook announced that the wearer was at least of the fourth imperial rank, as explicitly as a gold oak leaf on the collar now identifies a U.S. Army major. Through June 28. (Open Mondays through Saturdays, 10 to 5, and Tuesday evenings until 8; Sundays, 1 to 5.)



Sculptures by Karl Mann (Ricco/Maresca).

Jewish Museum, Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (423-3200)—"Bordering on Fiction: Chantal Akerman's 'D'Est,' " a film-and-video installation chronicling a trip through Eastern Europe and reunified Germany. Through May 27. (Open Sundays through Thursdays, 11 to 5:45, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

Museum of American Folk Art, Columbus Ave. at 65th St. (977-7170)—"Henry Darger: The Unreality of Being" is a retrospective devoted to watercolors and pencil drawings (apparently the outcome of the artist's childhood in orphanages and an asylum for the feebleminded) of virtuous girls threatened by villainous adults. (Open daily, except Mondays, 11:30 to 7:30.)

The New Museum, 583 Broadway, between Houston and Prince Sts. (219-1222)—Since 1983, the Chilean artist Eugenio Dittborn has been using the international mails to distribute his paintings; in the beginning it was a way of circumventing the restrictive Pinochet regime, but it has become an integral part of his politically charged (though not preachy) art. He paints, prints, and sews his images—field photographs of Indians, pictures from police files, children's drawings, scribbles by schizophrenics—onto flimsy canvas squares, which the recipient then reassembles; after they have been exhibited, they are mailed to the next place. The envelopes that carried the works are exhibited next to them, giving the show a truly global scale. Through April 13. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 6; Saturday evenings until 8, with no admission charge after 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, uptown and downtown galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; Chelsea galleries are generally closed Tuesdays and open Sundays.)

Joe Brainard (1942-94)—A mini retrospective of works by a writer and painter who deserves a far wider audience. What unified his art—paintings of his sleeping dog, a tenderly pathetic picture of a bouquet of pansies, an ink drawing of a cup of coffee—was his sweet and attentive temperament. Does this sound unsophisticated? It isn't. Through April 19. (DeNagy, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 262-5050.)

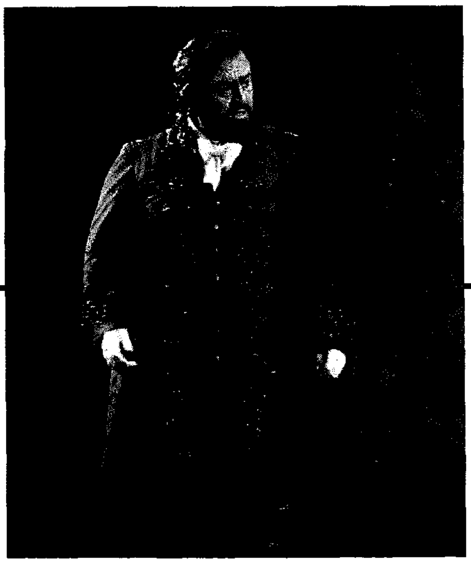
Alice Neel (1900-84)—"Paintings from the Thirties," an extraordinary show of early works from a period when the artist was still experimenting with various styles. Her characteristically precise yet sympathetic observation is abundantly evident in several of the portraits. The most extraordinary image must be the famous nude portrait of Joe Gould, impressively endowed with three penises. Through April 12. (Robert Miller, 41 E. 57th St. 980-5454.)

Louise Nevelson—Pencil and ink drawings and plaster sculptures from the thirties, executed somewhat dutifully in the Cubist style that then reigned, but vital and charming nonetheless. The boxy sculptures, most of them painted black, have a declarative bluntness that glows with candor, sometimes to the point of dopiness. But the drawings—nudes and portraits (including one of Diego Rivera) shaped with a few deft strokes—radiate rightness. Through April 19. (Washburn, 20 W. 57th St. 397-6780.)

Tabitha Vevers—A willfully eccentric exhibition of shaped panels combining images of the human torso with cryptic symbols: a man with a womb, a woman's pelvis littered with eggshells. Classical allusions are scattered promiscuously, as in "Fire, Remembered," a visual macaronic that cryptically combines a pair of lovers, painted on a Pompeian-red ground, with a Mycenaean helmet. In the rear gallery is an intriguing set of miniature paintings executed on vellum, mounted on glass, and piled into a handsome copper box. Vevers's vivid imagination sometimes outstrips her abilities. Through April 19. (Kraushaar, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 307-5730.)

Christian Vincent—Fragments of narrative, some intimate (a man turning his back on a sleeping woman), others with an industrial tone (a group of filmmakers examining a strip of celluloid), which invoke the world of Raymond Chandler and film noir. But this influence hasn't been very well digested, and neither has Edward Hopper's, which some of the canvases fairly shriek. Vincent has none of Hopper's humanity; he paints with real skill, using a darkly handsome palette of ambers and scarlets glinting in a sepia mist, but the effect is fussy. Through May 3. (Forum, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 355-4545.)

Group Show—"Figured," a miscellany of paintings, photographs, and collages depicting the human form. The show isn't held together by any discernible curatorial concept, but it does offer some strong work: Donald Baechler's witty, mordant doodle of a boy's head; David Levinthal's evocative photograph of a hula doll, rendered on a monumental scale; Nancy Spero's bold collocation of Marlene Dietrich in a man's suit and the Egyptian



Andrea Chénier.
Luciano Pavarotti.
One man inspired an opera.
The other ignites it.

For the first time ever, Luciano Pavarotti is Andrea Chénier. A poet made to pay a chilling price for true love during the throes of the French Revolution. And in its wake, both he and his lover make the ultimate sacrifice. Maria Guleghina as Maddalena de Coigny, Juan Pons as Carlo Gérard.

The Metropolitan Opera Presents
Umberto Giordano's Andrea Chénier
Conducted by James Levine
Wednesday, April 23
8 pm ET on PBS

Check local listings. Stereo simulcast in many areas.

Special funding for this program is provided by the Charles E. Culpeper Foundation and the Arthur F. and Alice E. Adams Charitable Foundation of Miami.

TEXACO

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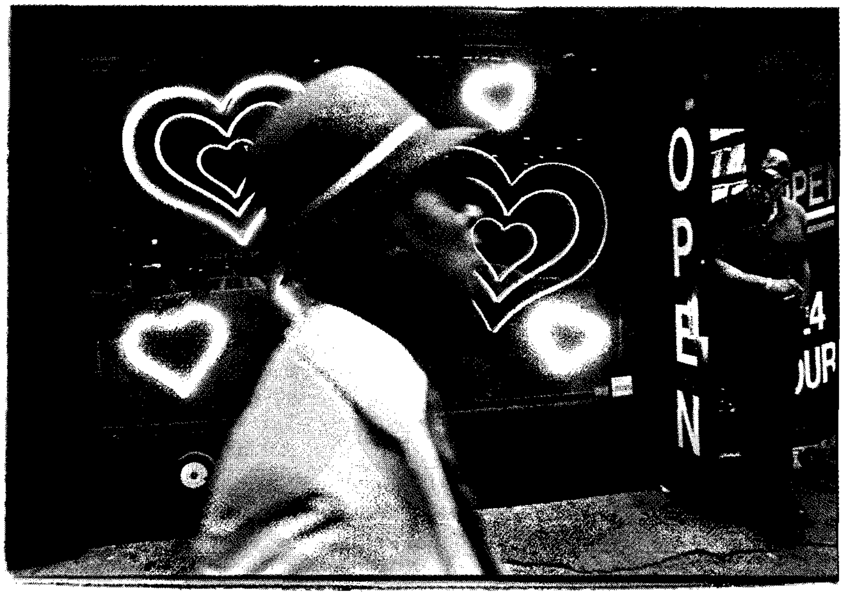
goddess Nut supporting the heavens. Through May 3. (Associated American Artists, 20 W. 57th St. 399-5510.)

Short List—**JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT AND ANDY WARHOL**, Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 744-2313. Through April 26.... **TOM CHRISTOPHER**, David Findlay, 984 Madison Ave., at 77th St. 249-2909. Open Mondays; through May 3.... **NIKI DE SAINT PHALLE**, Rickards, 1045 Madison Ave., at 79th St. 924-0858. Through April 19.... **JAMES HAVARD**, Stone, 113 E. 90th St. 987-1655. Through April 26.... **WILLIAM KING**, Dintenfass, 20 E. 79th St. 581-2268. Through April 26.... **KÄTHE KOLLWITZ** and **LEA GRUNDIG**, Galerie St. Etienne, 24 W. 57th St. 245-6734. Through May 31.... **NORMAN LUNDIN**, Schmidt-Bingham, 41 E. 57th St. 888-1122. Through April 26.... **MARY PETTY**, Syracuse University's Lubin House, 11 E. 61st St. 826-0320. Through April 28.... **ELLEN PHELAN**, Danese, 41 E. 57th St. 223-2227. Through April 19.... **KATHERINE PORTER**, Salander-O'Reilly, 20 E. 79th St. 879-6606. Open Mondays; through April 26.... **SOPHIE RYDER**, O'Hara, 41 E. 57th St. 355-3330. Open Mondays; through May 3.... **RICHARD STANKIEWICZ**, Zabriskie, 41 E. 57th St. 752-1223. Through May 3.... **MARK WETHLI**, Tatistcheff, 50 W. 57th St. 664-0907. Through April 24.



"Times Square, 1996," by Michael Ackerman (Bodell).

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Doug Aitken—Two installations by the video artist. "Diamond Sea" canvases the weird, seemingly extraterrestrial landscape of the Namib Desert, home to one of the world's richest diamond mines. Accompanied by a soundtrack of environmental noise and ambient music, the multi-screen projections are both ominous and beautiful. "Cathouse" consists of a Naumanesque maze in which every surface has been carpeted; two monitors show various people (including Iggy Pop) looking very, very nervous and jittery. The gallery has opened its basement as an additional exhibition space, currently housing another installation and various photographs by Aitken. Through April 26. (303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 255-1121. Closed Sundays.)

Short List—**NAYLAND BLAKE**, Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 243-0200. Through April 26.... **LINDA BURNHAM**, Fredericks, 504 W. 22nd St. 633-6555. Through April 20.... **LEWIS DE SOTO**, Maynes, 529 W. 20th St. 741-3318. Through May 11.... **KATHERINE DIMMA** and **ALLISON SMITH**, Clementine, 526 W. 26th St. 243-5937. Both shows through May 11.... **ARTURO DU CLOS**, Nosei, 530 W. 22nd St. 741-8695. Through April 30.... **RACHEL HARRISON**, Greene Naftali, 526 W. 26th St. 463-7770. Through April 20.... **MIKE SALE**, XL, 504 W. 22nd St. 462-4111. Through April 27.... **JOE SCANLAN**, D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 352-9460. Through April 26.... **GEORGE STOLL**, Morris-Healy, 530 W. 22nd St. 243-3753. Through May 11.... **LINCOLN TOBIER**, Hearn, 530 W. 22nd St. 727-7366. Through April 13.... **MICHAEL TONG**, Kravets/Wehby, 529 W. 21st St. 352-2238. Through May 10.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Meg Cranston—Paintings and sculptures by a Los Angeles-based artist with a pronounced conceptualist bent. There is probably a relationship between the various elements, but it's not always easy to discern. Perhaps the most immediately accessible piece is "Prop for a Soul Singer," which consists of a sofa on a dolly, with an attached rope, presumably for lugging it about. The singer alluded to is Marvin Gaye, who apparently expressed a wish to perform while lying on a couch. Through April 19. (Boesky & Callery, 51 Greene St. 941-9888.)

Robert Mangold—"Zone Paintings," four large tripartite canvases by a virtuoso of minimalist elegance. In each one, paired ellipses flank a central rectangle. The painter's vocabulary of forms remains constant, but the effect is, as always, numinous. Through April 26. (Pace Wildenstein, 142 Greene St. 431-9224.)

Karl Mann—A prolific collection of flea-market assemblages that traffic in a sort of Mad Lib surrealism (matador and artichoke, egret and shoehorn, gorilla and baseballs). The artist, whose mother put him in a Chicago orphanage when he was four, has a delicate touch with junk, and despite the show's combative title, "Dumb," the silliness is poignant. Through April 12. (Ricco/Maresca, 152 Wooster St. 780-0071.)

Elizabeth Peyton—New paintings by a young artist who favors images of rock stars, royalty, and her friends, which, in standard postmodern fashion, she draws from photographs. Her technique, though, is nothing if not painterly, with colors so rich and lambent that the pictures seem to glow from within. Not to be missed. Through April 12. (Gavin Brown's Enterprise, 558 Broome St. 431-1512. Closed Tuesdays.)

Jason Rhoades—"Deviations in Space, Various Virgins," a gallery-wide installation by a young Los Angeles-based artist. How to describe this massive accumulation of junk, or the oblique yet palpable connections he creates within the chaos? Like a number of current artists, Rhoades wants to provoke a reaction—but more gentle temperaments may prefer to flee, and fast. Through April 26. (Zwirner, 43 Greene St. 966-9074.)

Frank Stella—Two new monumental sculptures, which represent yet a further stage in his evolution. One seems to flirt with representation—it looks rather like a ruined rocket or jet fuselage—and the other is nothing short of stunning: a bizarre, Medusan coil of metal, vaguely reminiscent of the mad chapeaus that the British milliner Philip Tracey has been sending down the runways. Through April 26. (Gagosian, 136 Wooster St. 228-2828.)

Nicola Tyson—Like a lot of other contemporary painters, Tyson is irresistibly drawn to the Surrealist biomorph; but, whereas Terry Winters and Carroll Dunham take their inspiration from semi-abstraction (Matta, Gorky, Miró), she elaborates on the figurative wing of Surrealism. The potential for violence and metamorphosis remains subdued in her truncated, mutated figures. Perhaps the most interesting thing about her recent work, though, is her apparent retreat from the mechanics of sexuality. Through April 26. (Petzel, 26 Wooster St. 334-9466.)

Short List—**SKIP ARNOLD**, Brownstone, 39 Wooster St. 334-3455. Through April 19.... **LOUISE BELCOURT**, Blum, 99 Wooster St. 343-0441. Through May 3.... **LENA CRONQVIST**, Nordanstad, 289 Hudson St. 627-6628. Through April 26.... **DAN GRIGGS**, Cacciola, 125 Wooster St. 966-9177. Through April 19.... **JANE HAMMOND**, Luhring Augustine, 130 Prince St. 219-9600. Through April 26.... **MICHELE HARVEY**, Bridgewater/Lustberg, 560 Broadway. 941-6355. Through April 19.... **ELLEN LANYAN**, Zarre, 48 Greene St. 966-2222. Through May 10.... **LUIGI ONTANI**, Sperone Westwater, 142 Greene St. 431-3685. Through April 26.... **ROXY PAINE**, Feldman, 31 Mercer St. 226-3232. Through April 26.... **NICHOLAS PEARSON**, Condeso-Lawler, 524 Broadway. 219-1283. Through May 3.... **MIRIAM SCHAPIRO**, Steinbaum Krauss, 132 Greene St. 431-4224. Through April 26.... **NIKKO SEDGWICK**, Dillon, 431 West Broadway. 966-2977. Through April 21.... **LISA DEANNE SMITH**, White Columns, 154 Christopher St. 924-4212. Through May 4.... **KEITH SONNIER**, Castelli, 420 West Broadway. 431-5160. Also at Klagsbrun, 80 Mercer St. 925-5157. Both shows through April 26.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Christie's—April 9-10: Very high-end jewelry.... ¶ April 11: English furniture.... ¶ April 12: In 1930, an aspiring architect named Philip Johnson boldly commissioned the far more eminent Mies van der Rohe to design the furniture for his apartment. Four of the resulting pieces are up for auction in a decorative-art sale.... ¶ April 15: More than a hundred and sixty Fabergé creations dominate an auction of silver and objects of virtu. (Park Ave. at 59th St. 546-1000.) ... At **CHRISTIE'S EAST**: Auctions of books, on April 9 and April 13. (219 E. 67th St. 606-0400.)

Sotheby's—April 10: Rugs and carpets.... ¶ April 11-12: English country-house furnishings, including a large selection of sporting paintings. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

Doyle—A wide-ranging auction of decorative art includes more than two hundred pieces of Lalique glass. (175 E. 87th St. 427-2730. April 9.)

The Sixties Show—Eighty dealers offer "antiques" (can it be?) from the sixties, with a bit of overflow into the adjoining decades. (69th Regiment Armory, Lexington Ave. at 25th St. April 12-13. For information, call 255-0020.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

Michael Ackerman—Buzzing, off-kilter black-and-white images of the vanishing street life of Times Square. Through April 27. (Bodell, 13 E. 7th St. 477-1820. Open Tuesdays through Sundays, noon to 7.)

William Eggleston—Twenty recently made dye-transfer prints of photographs from the seventies. An Eggleston show is always a must for votaries of color, and the images here—a gaggle of bowling trophies on a cigarette machine, a red-sweatered little boy by the side of the road, a Cadillac hoodful of baby dolls—are worthy of a pilgrimage. Through April 12. (Robert Miller, 41 E. 57th St. 980-5454.)

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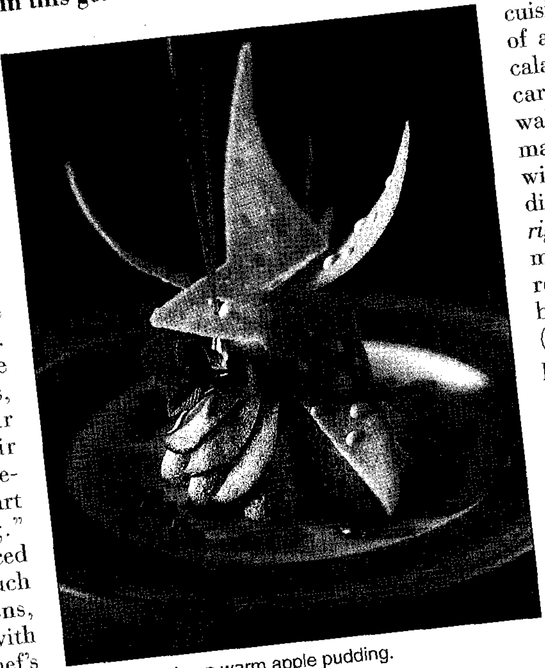
TASTE OF NEW YORK:

Visa's Preferred Guide to Dining

By Susan Breslow Sardone

Thanks to Visa and this restaurant review program exclusive to *The New Yorker*, every time you charge a meal using your Visa® card at any of the participating restaurants in this and upcoming "Taste of New York" features, you'll also contribute to helping Citymeals-on-Wheels feed the homebound elderly.* The following are among the many restaurants involved in this generous effort.



Aureole's spin on warm apple pudding.

AUREOLE •34 East 61st Street •212-319-1660 Located inside an elegantly converted brownstone, Aureole's white linen tablecloths, resplendent floral arrangements, and sandstone bas-reliefs emerging from cream-colored walls set the scene for culinary pleasure. Chef-owner Charlie Palmer says he believes, "People eat with their eyes as well as their mouths, which makes presentation an integral part of the art of cooking." And what a well-practiced art it is: Appetizers such as veal-stuffed wontons, oak-smoked salmon with velvet blini, and the chef's signature sea scallop sandwich in potato crust delight all the senses. Equally superb entrées and inspired desserts—such as spring's topiary citrus cheesecake with strawberry rhubarb compote—make dining here an incomparable experience.

CONTRAPUNTO •200 East 60th Street •212-751-8616 Across from Bloomingdale's, Contrapunto provides shoppers and Third Avenue cinemagoers with hearty pastas, grilled Mediterranean fare, flavorful salads, and a view from its second floor, glassed-in aerie. While considering the menu, savor the homemade foccaccia. Appetizers include fennel-cured salmon, and grilled quail with gorgonzola polenta, port wine syrup, and almonds. Pasta's the main attraction, though, and can be a meal in itself. Among the dozen fresh and filling choices is *tagliarini forte* with smoked bacon, jalapeños, fresh tomatoes, and arugula. Entrées include crisp duck breast and grilled rabbit saddle. And if there's time for dessert before the movie, try the caramelized rice pudding, homemade gelati, or chocolate and caramel mousse combo.

LE MADRI •168 West 18th Street •212-727-8022 Le ponytail...Le Armani suit...Le Madri. A fashionable crowd fills this spacious restaurant whose cuisine draws inspiration from the best cooks of all, Italian mothers. Start with the crispy calamari with seafood fritters, or seared beef carpaccio with spaghetti squash, asparagus, walnuts, and pecorino. Pastas include homemade ravioli filled with broccoli and tossed with clams, and every menu offers a risotto dish. New chef Angelo Sessa has introduced *rigatoni alla Siciliana*, penne with Neapolitan meat sauce, and braised lamb shank with red wine and butternut squash served on a bed of polenta. Can't decide? Try the three (pretheater) or four-course tasting menu. Valet parking is available.

MESA GRILL •102 Fifth Avenue (15th St.) •212-807-7400 For the longest time, New Yorkers complained they couldn't get good Southwestern food in the city. They stopped when Chef Bobby Flay opened Mesa Grill and demonstrated how imaginative he could be with a chile. "Our goal has always been to create an atmosphere of what I call serious fun," he says of the place where waiters don cowboy gear, and loud music and energetic crowds prevail. "Each mouthful packs a punch." Zesty dishes include shrimp and roasted garlic corn tamale, grilled Yucatan tuna, red chile rubbed salmon, and fire roasted ancho chicken. A selection of twenty different tequilas helps stoke the fire.

Illustration by Linda Bronson

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James A. Fox—An impressive selection of images drawn from the photographer's twenty-five years as an observer of the boxing world, from the top (a 1975 portrait of Muhammad Ali) to the bottom (a sexy pair of Gypsy boys from the streets of Paris). The action shots pack a wallop; the beautifully observed studies of losers, exhausted and mutilated, are wrenching. Through April 12. (Yoshii, 20 W. 57th St. 265-8876.)

Michael Kenna—Jewel-like images of bridges in Paris and Prague, the windmills of La Mancha, and the seventeenth-century gardens of André Lenôtre. Kenna was the darling of this year's Association of International Photography Art Dealers show a few weeks ago, and for good reason: his black-and-white visions strike an elegant balance between the formal and the mysterious qualities of the altered landscape. Through April 26. (Mann, 42 E. 76th St. 570-1223.)

Andrea Modica—These documentarylike portraits (the artist calls them "fictions"), mostly of children in rural Treadwell, New York, reveal the terrors of domestic discomfort with startling ease. Here, a boy stands near an overturned wading pool, hugging a tree; elsewhere, Barbara (Modica's most frequent subject) stands in a doorway, upset or just tired, staring reproachfully at the camera. Through April 19. (Houk Friedman, 851 Madison Ave., at 70th St. 628-5300.)

Jindrich Styrsky (1899-1942)—"Emilie Comes to Me in a Dream," pornographic collages and photomontages by the Czech avant-gardist. Also on view are erotic photographs and collages by Hans Bellmer, Janusz Maria Brzeski, Georges Hugnet, and André Racz. Through May 3. (Ubu, 16 E. 78th St. 794-4444.)

"Brooklyn, New York, U.S.A."—A salon-style presentation of more than seventy works from the turn of the century to the present, by such disparate artists as Nat Fein, Vincent Cianni, Benn Mitchell, Louis Stettner, Kim Iacono, Berenice Abbott, and William Klein. Through May 3. (Benrubi, 52 E. 76th St. 517-3766.)

"The Sex Show"—Images of eroticism and exhibitionism by Paul Outerbridge, Jr., Edward Weston, Pierre Molinier, Larry Clark, Joel Peter Witkin, Merry Alpern, and others. Through May 17. (Richardson, 560 Broadway. 343-1255.)

International Center of Photography, 1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. (860-1777)—"Art & Science: Investigating Matter," a series of laboratory photographs by Catherine Wagner. Through June 15. (Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

International Center of Photography Midtown, Sixth Ave. at 43rd St. (860-1777)—"Written in Memory: Portraits of the Holocaust," Jeffrey A. Wolin's images of survivors with handwritten texts on the surfaces of the prints. Through April 20. . . . ¶ "War Story," an installation by Mikael Levin. Through April 20. (Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

Short List—**mark abramson,** Camera Club, 853 Broadway, at 14th St. 260-7077. Opens at noon; through April 23. . . . **david armstrong,** Marks, 1018 Madison Ave., at 79th St. 861-9455. Through May 23. . . . **tina barney,** Borden, 560 Broadway. 431-0166. Through May 10. . . . **lois conner,** Laurence Miller, 138 Spring St. 226-1220. Through April 19. . . . **yevgeny khaldei,** Schickler, 52 E. 76th St. 737-6647. Open Mondays; through April 26. . . . **inez van lamsweerde,** Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 243-0200. Through May 17. . . . . **o. winston link,** McEnroe, 41 Greene St. 219-0395. Through April 19. . . . **alison rossiter,** Morthland, 225 Tenth Ave., at 23rd St. 242-7767. Opens at noon; through April 13. . . . **andres serrano,** Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 255-1105. Open Tuesdays, closed Sundays; through April 12 . . . . **ezra stoller** and **weegee,** Danziger, 130 Prince St. 226-0056. Both shows through April 12 . . . . **arne svenson,** Saul, 560 Broadway. 431-0747. Through May 10.

(See the museum listings for a photography exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

(The box-office number for Alice Tully Hall is 875-5050, and for Carnegie Hall and Weill Recital Hall, 247-7800.)

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera—**faust,** with Veronica Villarroel, Richard Leech, Dwayne Croft, and Samuel Ramey; conducted by Julius Rudel. (April 9 at 8.) . . . With Ms. Villarroel, Jianyi Zhang, Mr. Croft, and Robert Lloyd; Mr. Rudel. (April 12 at 8.) . . . With Ms. Villarroel, Mr. Leech, Mr. Croft, and Mr. Lloyd; Mr. Rudel. (April 15 at 8.) . . . **eugene onegin,** in a new production, with Galina Gorchakova, Marianna Tarassova, Vladimir Chernov, Franco Farina, and Paul Plishka; Antonio Pappano. (April 10 at 8.) . . . With Vladimir Ognovenko instead of Mr. Plishka. (April 14 at 8.) . . . **madama butterfly,** with Michele Crider, Walter Fraccaro, and Alan Opie; John Fiore. (April 11 at 8.) . . . **die walküre,** with Hildegard Behrens, Deborah Voigt, Hanna Schwarz, Plácido Domingo, James Morris, and John Macurdy; James Levine. (April 12 at 12:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

New York City Opera—**rigoletto.** (April 9 at 8.) . . . **turandot.** (April 10 at 8.) . . . **the visit of the old lady,** by Gottfried von Einem (with a libretto crafted by Friedrich Dürrenmatt from his acclaimed play), in a new production featuring mezzo-soprano Joyce Castle. (April 11 at 8.) . . . **don giovanni.** (April 12 at 1:30.) . . . A double bill of Orff's **carmina burana** and Weill's **the seven deadly sins.** (April 12 at 8.) . . . **madama butterfly.** (April 13 at 1:30.) . . . **the mikado.** (April 15 at 8.) (New York State Theatre. 870-5570.)

Dicapo Opera Theatre—Opening performances of "Madama Butterfly." (184 E. 76th St. 288-9438. April 10-12 at 8. Through April 20.)

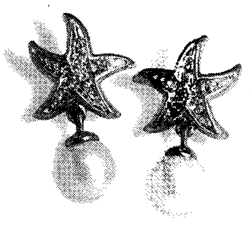
ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic—At Avery Fisher Hall, André Previn conducting. April 9 at 6:45: A Rush Hour Concert comprising Berlioz's "Roman Carnival Overture" and William Schuman's Symphony No. 3. . . . ¶ April 10-12 at 8 and April 15 at 7:30: The Berlioz and Schuman works as above, plus Chopin's F-Minor Piano Concerto (with Emanuel Ax). . . . ¶ April 12 at 2: A Young People's Concert that includes duo-piano performances by Messrs. Previn and Ax. (875-5030.)

Boston Symphony Orchestra—At Carnegie Hall, Seiji Ozawa conducting. April 9-10 at 8: Contemporary composers have had few better friends than Mstislav Rostropovich, the cellist, pianist, and conductor, who has commissioned dozens of new works and championed them through repeated performances at high-profile venues. Among the gifts he received for his seventieth birthday (which fell on March 27) were, appropriately, more new pieces to play: Bernard Rands's Cello Concerto No. 1 and Augusta Read Thomas's "Chanson." Both receive their New York premières in this concert (following by a week their world premières in Boston). Mr. Rostropovich is the soloist in both, as well as in Strauss's "Don Quixote." . . . ¶ April 11 at 8: Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto (featuring Akiko Suwanai) and his "Manfred" Symphony.

Choir of St. Margaret's Church, Westminster Abbey—Sixteen singers attached to what is popularly called "the parish church of the House of Commons" perform works by Purcell, Stanford, and others, in two different programs. (St. George's Church, 207 E. 16th St. April 10 at 8. Admission by contribution. . . . ¶ Trinity Church, Broadway at Wall St. April 11 at 1. Admission by contribution.)

Young Concert Artists—The organization, which tends to the careers of performers who are still on their way to full-time professional management, spotlights three of its current charges, backed up by the New York Chamber Symphony (Jesse Levine conducting): Diana Doherty (in Strauss's Oboe Concerto), Jan-Erik Gustafsson (in Tchaikovsky's "Rococo" Variations), and Fazil Say (in Saint-



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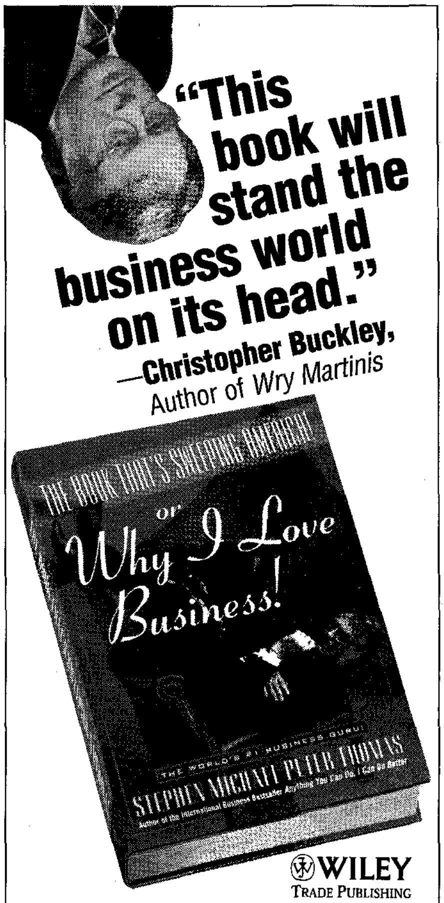
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Saëns's Piano Concerto No. 2). (Alice Tully Hall. April 10 at 8:30.)

American Symphony Orchestra—Leon Botstein conducts turn-of-the-century French scores that reflect the influence of Wagner: d'Indy's "Istar," Florent Schmitt's Psalm 47 (with soprano Korliss Uecker and the Canticum Novum Festival Singers), and Albéric Magnard's Symphony No. 3. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. April 13 at 3.)

American Composers Orchestra—Paul Lustig Dunkel leads the première of Sheila Silver's Piano Concerto (with Alexander Paley), in addition to compositions by Tina Davidson, Charles Tomlinson Griffes, and Karel Husa. (Carnegie Hall. April 13 at 3.)

Philadelphia Orchestra—An all-Russian program, conducted by Riccardo Chailly: Prokofiev's "Love for Three Oranges" Suite, Stravinsky's "Symphony in Three Movements," and Rachmaninoff's Symphony No. 3. (Carnegie Hall. April 14 at 8.)

Virginia Symphony—JoAnn Falletta leads Adolphus Hailstork's Piano Concerto (with Leon Bates), Barber's Symphony No. 1, and Elgar's "Enigma" Variations. (Carnegie Hall. April 15 at 8.)

RECITALS

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center—April 9 at 7:30: Members of the Society join with young artists on the rise for chamber works by Mozart and Mendelssohn. (Alice Tully Hall.) . . . ¶ April 13 at 5 and April 15 at 7:30: An evening of mostly vocal chamber music, including Schumann's "Spanische Liebeslieder" and Brahms's "Zigeunerlieder" (both featuring soprano Benita Valente, mezzo-soprano Marietta Simpson, tenor John Aler, and baritone Christòpheren Nomura), Jacob Druckman's "Counterpoise" (in the première of its chamber version, here with soprano Susan Narucki), and Schubert's "Trock'ne Blumen" Variations. (Alice Tully Hall.) . . . ¶ April 14 at 8: A twentieth-century program, including works by Carter, Wuorinen, and Edgar Meyer. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330.)

Schubertiade—The 92nd Street Y's decade-long Schubert celebration reaches its end. April 9 at 8: James Levine and Ken Noda team up for two of the composer's last piano duets, the F-Minor Fantasia and the "Lebensstürme" (D. 947); baritone Håkan Hagegård and Mr. Levine (at the piano) perform "Schwanengesang." . . . ¶ April 10 at 8: Schubert's Quartet in D Minor ("Death and the Maiden") and his final chamber work, the C-Major String Quintet, performed by the Tokyo String Quartet, assisted by cellist Gary Hoffman. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100.)

Bargemusic—Violinist Mark Peskanov and pianist André-Michel Schub perform three Beethoven violin sonatas: in E-Flat Major (Op. 12, No. 3), A Major (Op. 30, No. 1), and A Major (Op. 47, the "Kreutzer"). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-4061. April 10 at 7:30 and April 13 at 4.)

Angela Hewitt—The Canadian pianist offers several preludes and fugues from Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier" (Book One), as well as works by Messiaen (including the "Regard de la Vierge" and "Regard de l'Esprit de Joie" from "Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant Jésus."). (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. April 10 at 8.)

Paula Robison and Friends—The flutist and several colleagues offer concertos by Vivaldi and Salieri, Telemann's A-Minor Suite, and Mozart's C-Major Andante (K. 315). (Temple of Dendur, Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. April 11-12 at 7.)

Sanford Sylvan—Baritone, with pianist David Breitman, performing Schubert's "Winterreise." (Weill Recital Hall, at Carnegie Hall. April 11 at 8.)

Huelgas Ensemble—The conductor and musicologist Paul Van Nevel founded this Belgian ensemble in 1970 and has led it to early-music stardom, thanks in part to a series of more than twenty top-drawer releases of Renaissance music on Sony Classical's Vivarte label. In the group's New York début, polyphonic works from the Middle Ages rub shoulders with richly contrapuntal motets and Mass

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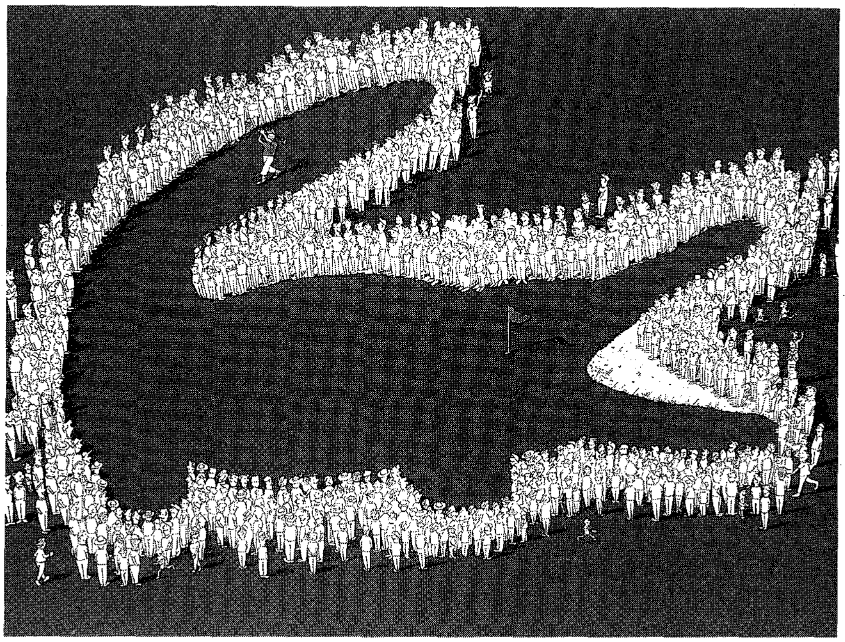

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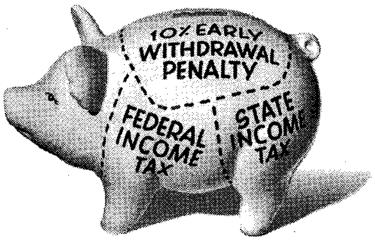

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movements by the sixteenth-century Franco-Flemish composers Nicolas Gombert and Pierre de Manchicourt (the latter, a particularly eccentric master, being the focus of the ensemble's latest Vivarte production). The pièce de résistance, however, is a rare performance of Antoine Brumel's twelve-voiced Mass "Et Ecce Terrae Motus," the so-called "Earthquake" Mass, in which Mr. Van Nevel has said he detects "the most prominent architectonic structures in flamboyant late Gothic art." (Church of Our Saviour, 59 Park Ave., at 38th St. April 12 at 8. For information about tickets, call 800-627-0655.)

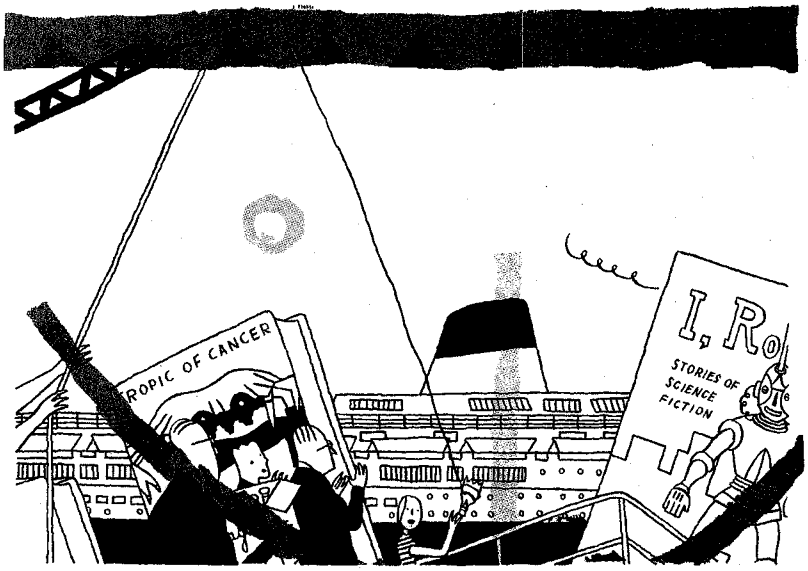
Håkan Hagegård—The baritone performs Dominick Argento's "A Few Words About Chekhov" (with mezzo-soprano Charlotte Hellekant assisting), as well as songs by Schubert, Brahms, and Sibelius; with pianist Warren Jones. (Alice Tully Hall. April 12 at 8.)

Continuum—The modern-music ensemble acknowledges Finland's vibrant contemporary-music scene with performances of works by Magnus Lindberg, Kaija Saariaho, and Jouni Kaipainen, among others. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. April 12 at 8:30.)

Erez Ofer—The concertmaster of the Philadelphia Orchestra performs in two concerts. April 13 at noon: Vivaldi's "Four Seasons," with the Israeli Virtuosi. (Le Refuge Inn, 620 City Island Ave., City Island, the Bronx. 718-885-2478.) . . . ¶ April 14 at 8: Beethoven's G-Major Violin Sonata and works by Sarasate, with pianist Ilan Rechtman. (Mansfield Hotel, 12 W. 44th St. No tickets necessary.)

Ding, Dong—A hundred ringers from three states assemble for Riverside Church's annual handbell festival. (Riverside Dr. at 120th St. April 13 at 4. Admission by contribution.)

Barros Classical Consort—Presenting period-instrument interpretations of chamber music by Beethoven. (Lang Recital Hall, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. 772-4448. April 14 at 8.)



"Maiden Voyages," at the New York Public Library.

LAURENT CILLUFFO

At the Morgan Library—This installment of the museum's chamber series spotlights violinist Laurie Smukler, cellist Carter Brey, and pianist Ursula Oppens in works by Stravinsky, Grieg, and Beethoven (his "Archduke" Trio). (29 E. 36th St. 685-0008, ext. 347. April 15 at 6:15.)

Aimez-Vous Schoenberg?—Soprano Christine Schadeberg, pianist Ophra Yerushalmi, and the Israeli Virtuosi chamber ensemble present early works by Schoenberg and music by French composers he influenced—Debussy, Ravel, and Dukas. The program concludes with Schoenberg's chamber arrangement of Debussy's "Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un Faune." (Jewish Museum, Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. 423-3224. April 15 at 6:30.)

Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio—Colleagues assist the ensemble in performing Brahms's Clarinet Trio, his Horn Trio, and his G-Minor Piano Quartet. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. April 15-16 at 8.)

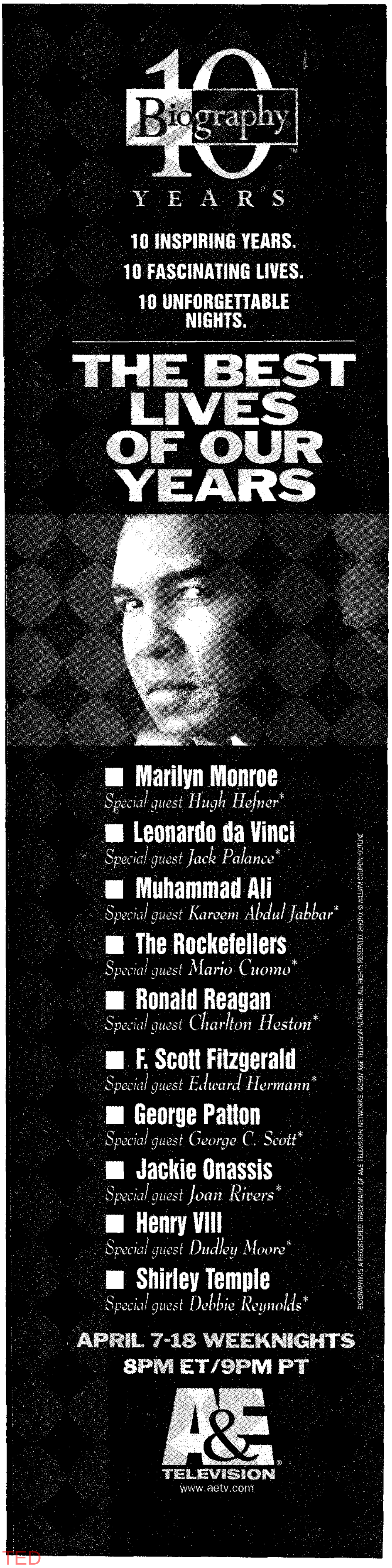
ABOVE AND BEYOND

"Maiden Voyages"—This broad collection of first editions of first books by American authors demonstrates some of the difficulties of becoming a published writer. Many of the books, such as William Carlos Williams's "Poems," were self-published; many sold poorly; many appeared pseudonymously or anonymously, such as Edgar Allan Poe's "Tamerlane and Other Poems," which identifies its author simply as "A Bostonian." The epigraph by Cowper which Poe chose for his cover—"Young heads are giddy and young hearts are warm, / And make mistakes for manhood to reform"—describes another pitfall for first-time authors: many of the books, such as Willa Cather's "April Twilights," a collection of poems which she later tried to remove from circulation, were embarrassments. The show serves as a nice reminder that even our best-known authors were once beginners. (Berg Collection, New York Public Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. Closed Mondays.)

Readings—April 9 at 6:30: Actors Malachy McCourt and Greg and James Naughton read Frank O'Connor's "First Confession," Ernest Hemingway's "Now I Lay Me," and Doris Lessing's "Through the Tunnel," respectively. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 864-5400.) . . . ¶ April 13 at 7: Short-story writer Alice Elliott Dark, novelist Edra Ziesk, and memoirist Jerry Stahl read from their work. (K.G.B., 85 E. 4th St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ April 14 at 7:30: Poets Kay Ryan and Denise Duhamel read their verse. (Fordham University at Lincoln Center, 113 W. 60th St. Tickets at the door.) . . . ¶ April 14 at 8:30: Writers Danielle McGurran, Sarah Saffian, and Laurel Touby read their own short works loosely related to family life; singer Joseph Belfatti closes the evening with songs in the same vein. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. Tickets at the door.)

Talks—April 9 at 6: Poet and translator Richard Howard interviews the Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk. (PEN America Center, 568 Broadway, at Prince St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ April 13 at 4: Astronaut and three-time space-shuttle crew member Ellen Baker expounds on the last frontier. (New York Hall of Science, 47-01 111th St., Flushing. For reservations, call 718-699-0005, ext. 373.) . . . ¶ April 15 at 6:15: Hendrik Hertzberg, editorial director of *The New Yorker*, gives his assessment of what's wrong with American politics. (Bobst Library, New York University, 70 Washington Sq. S., third floor. No tickets necessary.)

Walk—April 13 at 2: Architectural historian Alfred Pommer points out gargoyles and caryatids on a stroll from Madison Square Park to Greenwich Village. For more information, call 979-2388.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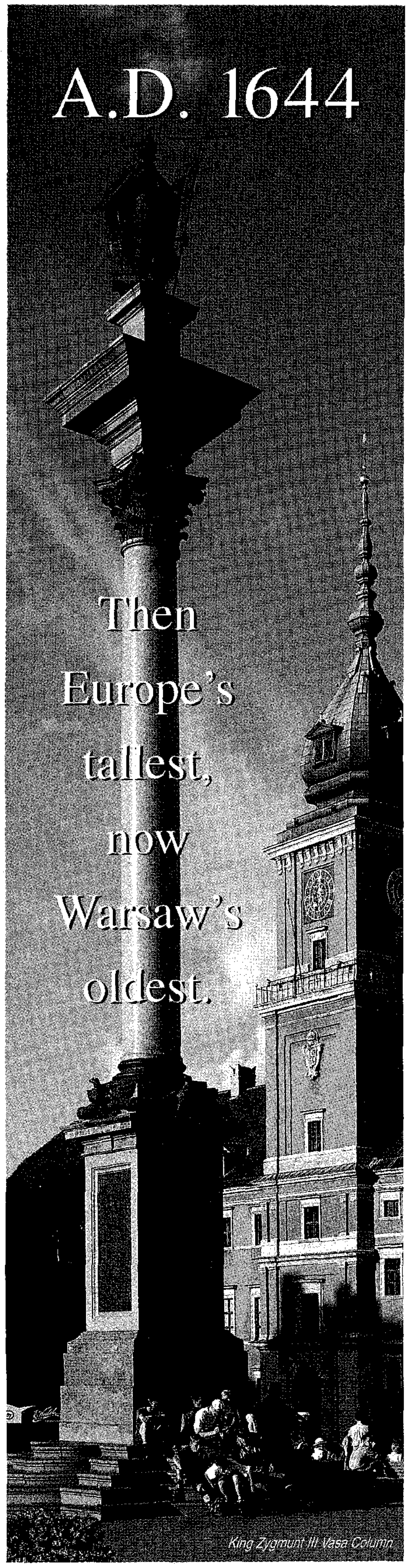
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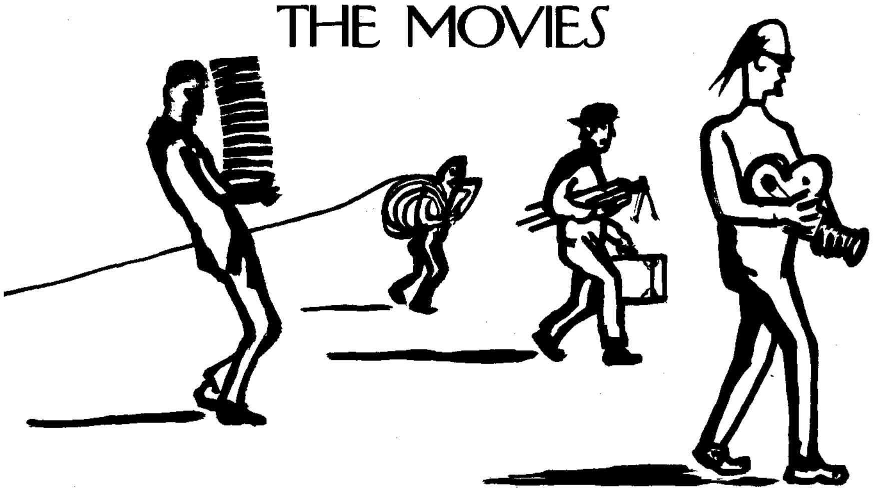
THE MOVIES



FILMS OPENING THIS WEEK

Anaconda—A film crew in the Brazilian rain forest finds more than it bargained for, in a thriller written by Hans Bauer, Jim Cash, and Jack Epps, Jr., and directed by Luis Llosa. With Jennifer Lopez, Ice Cube, Jon Voight, and Eric Stoltz. Opening April 11. (84th Street Sixplex, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, State, and Village Theatre VII.)

Così—The inmates of a mental hospital put on a performance of Mozart's opera "Così Fan Tutte," in a drama directed by Mark Joffe. Opening April 11. (Regency, 68th St. Playhouse, and Village East Cinemas.)

Grind—A romantic triangle involving two working-class brothers (Billy Crudup and Paul Schulze) and the wife of one of them (Adrienne Shelley). Written and directed by Chris Kentis. Opening April 11. (Quad Cinema.)

Grosse Pointe Blank—A hit man (John Cusack) returning to his home town for a high-school reunion encounters the girl he left behind (Minnie Driver) and a fellow hit man (Dan Aykroyd) out to kill him, in a comedy directed by George Armitage. With Alan Arkin. Opening April 11. (Cinema II, 86th Street East Twin, Guild, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, and Village Theatre VII.)

Paradise Road—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening April 11. (Beekman, Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and Village Theatre VII.)

Schizopolis—Steven Sonderbergh wrote, directed, and stars in this story of a speechwriter for a self-help guru. Opening April 9. (Cinema Village.)

CURRENT FILMS

(The signed notes are by Bruce Diones, Sarah Kerr, Anthony Lane, and Terrence Rafferty. If a movie has been reviewed in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given. Theatre information is listed on page 28.)

Anna Karenina—A faithful new adaptation of the Tolstoy novel which trots out plenty of clichés (an orgasmic Tchaikovsky soundtrack, foreboding shots of a speeding train) but has a few things going for it, too. Filmed in posh imperial-Russian villas and palaces, it looks both beautiful and convincing. And it tells the story from the point of view of Levin (Alfred Molina), the melancholy, philosophical friend of Anna's brother. By broadening the scope, the writer-director, Bernard Rose, gets closer to Tolstoy: the theme isn't merely passion, it's hanging onto the desire to live when life is endless pain. The drawback to this approach is that we also get more of Kitty, Levin's perky-angelic wife. Even the best of actresses would have trouble bringing this adorable male fantasy to life, and Mia Kirshner, who plays her here, is far from the best of actresses. At least Sean Bean, as Vronsky, makes a good, strapping, intermittently sensitive macho. And Sophie Marceau's focussed, reflective performance as Anna single-handedly carries the film through its hackneyed patches. She makes passion subtle.—S.K. (Angelika Film Center and Paris.)

Boys Life 2—Two years ago, the first "Boys Life" proved there was an audience for short, gay-themed films, and this latest bundle is more consistent than the last. The best of the four is "Alkali, Iowa," written and directed with great confidence and care by Mark Christopher. A jewel of a story about a young gay farmer's investigation into his father's past, it makes its points so quietly and indirectly that it comes close to poetry.—B.D. (Quad Cinema.)

Chasing Amy—In Kevin Smith's low-budget comedy, a young comic-book artist (Ben Affleck) falls in love—against his better judgment—with a pretty, vivacious blonde (Joey Lauren Adams), who is, inconveniently, a lesbian. Although Smith deserves credit for inventing an ingenious romantic-comedy premise, he doesn't have the skill to maintain a pleasurable sense of anticipation for an entire movie. This picture, his third, is as crummy-looking and as sluggishly paced as his début feature, "Clerks" (1994); at this point, his amateurishness can't be explained away as a suburban-grunge aesthetic style, or as any kind of style at all. Also with Jason Lee and Dwight Ewell.—T.R. (4/7/97) (Angelika Film Center, Cinema I, and Lincoln Square.)

City of Industry—John Irvin's bracing crime melodrama is a clean, unpretentious piece of craftsmanship. The screenplay, by Ken Solarz, gives us first the pleasure of a meticulously planned and coolly executed jewelry-store heist, and then the jolt of a double cross. The role of avenging the betrayal falls to the quietest and wariest of the thieves; he is played by Harvey Keitel, who brilliantly embodies the lowdown expertise that the movie as a whole celebrates. Also with Stephen Dorffand and Timothy Hutton.—T.R. (3/24/97) (Embassy 4.)

Crash—David Cronenberg's elegant adaptation of J. G. Ballard's infamous novel has been making waves of unease, and occasional nausea, ever since it screened at Cannes last year. As so often, the fuss feels out of proportion to the work, a small, cold, sense-numbing tale that takes itself, and its message to the mechanized world, very seriously indeed. Whereas the best Cronenberg movies are warmed by an animated central presence (Jeff Goldblum in "The Fly," for example), the director has crammed this one with spaced-out performers and encouraged them to act lobotomized. James Spader and Holly Hunter meet head-on in a car crash and take their relationship from there, setting in motion a sexual round-robin that includes Rosanna Arquette, Deborah Kara Unger, and Elias Koteas. In this echoing, sparsely peopled environment, no one slides into depravity—the characters are up to their necks in it from the start. They may be turned on by violent chaos, but it never really looks chaotic; Cronenberg, suave to a fault, arranges each crash like a still-life. Those who attend the film in the hope of arousal will probably go home with freeze-dried libidos.—A.L. (3/31/97)

(Angelika Film Center, Criterion Center, and Sutton. . . . ¶ Regency; through April 10.)

The Daytrippers—A Long Island schoolteacher (Hope Davis) suspects her husband (Stanley Tucci) of infidelity, and confesses her fears to her parents (Anne Meara and Pat McNamara), her sister (Parker Posey), and her sister's boyfriend (Liev Schreiber). The whole group then piles into the car and heads for Manhattan, hoping to pick up the elusive husband's scent. This low-budget début feature by the writer and director Greg Mottola is no big deal, but it has a terrific ensemble, and Mottola's affection for the characters is obvious.—T.R. (3/24/97) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

The Devil's Own—Tom O'Meara (Harrison Ford), the hero of Alan J. Pakula's new movie, is a middle-aged New York City cop, who, out of the goodness of his Irish-American heart, takes in a shy, taciturn young immigrant named Rory Devaney (Brad Pitt) and then discovers that his polite lodger is in fact an I.R.A. terrorist on an arms-purchasing mission. This is a star vehicle, but both stars shed dim light here, as if they were coming to us from a galaxy far, far away. And the movie is resolutely unsuspenseful; Pakula does everything in his power to insure that we won't mistake his apparent thriller for a *real* thriller. What's most excruciating about his serious, adult approach is that it deprives us of basic action-movie entertainment without compensating us in the form of a single idea that an adult could take seriously. Also with Margaret Colin, Rubén Blades, Treat Williams, and George Hearn.—T.R. (4/7/97) (Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, Orpheum VII, 64th & 2nd, and Village Theatre VII.)

Donnie Brasco—The title character, played by Johnny Depp, is an undercover F.B.I. agent who infiltrates the Mafia by pretending to be a crooked jeweller—and also by pretending, even more successfully, to be incredibly dull. For some reason he is accepted into the Mob and befriended by Lefty (Al Pacino), a hoodlum on the wane. Pacino, as you would expect, gives a fine demonstration of sagging soulfulness, but it's hard to believe that people are still making movies that require us to feel sorry for mobsters. Paul Attanasio's script works hard to make fun of them, but Mike Newell's direction deadens any comedy in his quest for a violent mood piece.—A.L. (3/17/97) (Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, 64th and 2nd, and Village East Cinemas.)

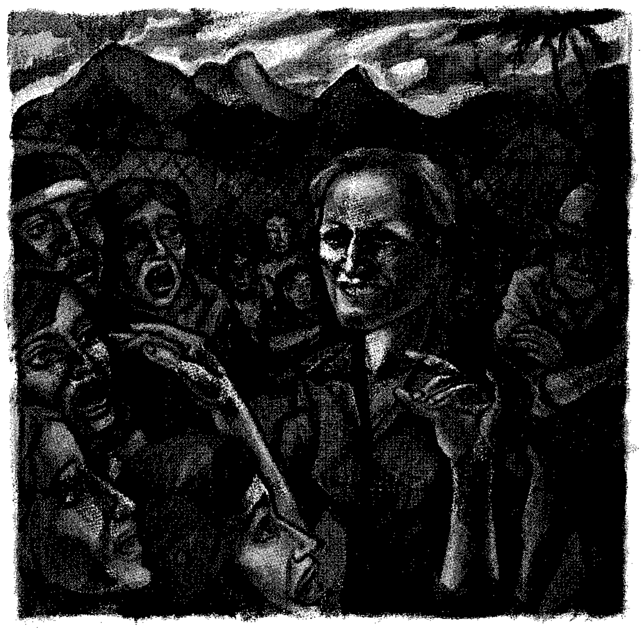
Double Team—Jean-Claude Van Damme and Dennis Rodman are counterterrorist experts in the Hong Kong director Tsui Hark's first English-language action film. (Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, Metro Cinema, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village East Cinemas.)

The English Patient—Written and directed by Anthony Minghella, from the novel by Michael Ondaatje, this long and searching movie tangles together a number of stories and characters: Almásy (Ralph Fiennes) and Katharine (Kristin Scott Thomas), who have an affair in North Africa before the Second World War; a French-Canadian nurse (Juliette Binoche) who cares for the badly burned Almásy after the war, and the Sikh soldier (Naveen Andrews) *she* has an affair with; and the mysterious Caravaggio (Willem Dafoe), a scavenging thief who appears to know the secrets of Almásy's past. The triumph of the film lies not just in the force and range of the performances but in Minghella's creation of an intimate epic: vast landscapes mingle with the minute details of desire, and the combination is transfixing.—A.L. (11/25/96) (Chelsea Cinemas, Embassy 3, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, New York Twin, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and Village East Cinemas.)

Inventing the Abbotts—A drama about the relationship between two sets of Illinois teenagers in the late fifties: the working-class Holt brothers (Joaquin Phoenix and Billy Crudup) and the affluent Abbott sisters (Liv Tyler, Jennifer Connelly, and Joanna Going). Directed by Pat O'Connor. (Chelsea Cinemas, Gotham Cinema, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, State, and Village East Cinemas.)

Kama Sutra—In Mira Nair's fairy tale, set in sixteenth-century India, Indira Varma plays a poor sexpot who seduces the king, gets cast out of her home, becomes a courtesan, and finally falls in love with the court sculptor (Ramon Tikaram). The movie succeeds so beautifully as a feast for the senses that Nair, apparently, sees no need to make the characters or the dialogue interesting.—S.K. (Cinema 3rd Avenue, Lincoln Square, and Village Theatre VII.)

Kolya—A likable enough Czech reworking of a tried-and-true formula: a sort of "Kramer vs. Kramer" set in Prague, in 1988-89, at the dawn of the Velvet Revolution. The screenwriter, Zdenek Sverak, also plays the central character, a bachelor cellist who suddenly finds himself responsible for an adorable Russian five-year-old. The cellist slowly grows out of his selfishness, and his love for this child who doesn't speak his language points to the new, boundaryless world that's about to open up. Directed by Jan Sverak. In Czech.—S.K. (First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Village East Cinemas.)



Opening April 11, Glenn Close in "Paradise Road."

ELIZABETH UYEHARA

Liar Liar—Not a great comedy, but a great idea for a comedy. Tom Shadyac's movie, written by Paul Guay and Stephen Mazur, stars Jim Carrey as a no-good, lowdown, lying lawyer named Fletcher, whose life is upended when his five-year-old son makes a birthday wish that, for exactly one day, his father will be incapable of telling a lie. The notion of truth as not just impractical but downright anarchic is highly attractive, and as Fletcher peels away the layers of venal charm, you wait to discover an even more pungent venality beneath. Instead—guess what—he turns out to be a nice guy. The movie is one part explosive to two parts repentant: far too sickly a recipe, although Jim Carrey works manfully to liven it up. His face and body go to war with themselves as he struggles against sincerity, and you feel let down when he finally surrenders to the forces of mush. Shadyac is on a roll: his last film was the equally genial remake of "The Nutty Professor," and it's touching to find a director who believes in all sincerity that jokes about gas and pimples are, and always will be, inherently funny. With Maura Tierney as Fletcher's ex and Jennifer Tilly as an unstoppable sex machine.—A.L. (3/31/97) (Chelsea West, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema, National Twin, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 34th Street Showplace, and Waverly.)

Licensed to Kill—Arthur Dong's documentary explores the backgrounds and motivations of prisoners convicted of killing gay men. (Film Forum.)

Love and Other Catastrophes—Australian director Emma-Kate Croghan chronicles a day in the life of two film students (Frances O'Conner and Alice Garner) preparing to throw a party in their new apartment. (Angelika Film Center, Eastside Playhouse, and 62nd & Broadway.)

Love Jones—Writer-director Theodore Witcher's romantic comedy about a group of young middle-class blacks is set in Chicago's smoky poetry scene, with jazz placed tastefully throughout. The film tries a little too hard to be engagingly witty and upscale, but it has some of the most attractive—and sexiest—actors in a long time. The chemistry of the leads, Larenz Tate and Nia Long, is enough to make the movie likable, and they're surrounded by equally sassy friends and neighbors.—B.D. (Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, Manhattan Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

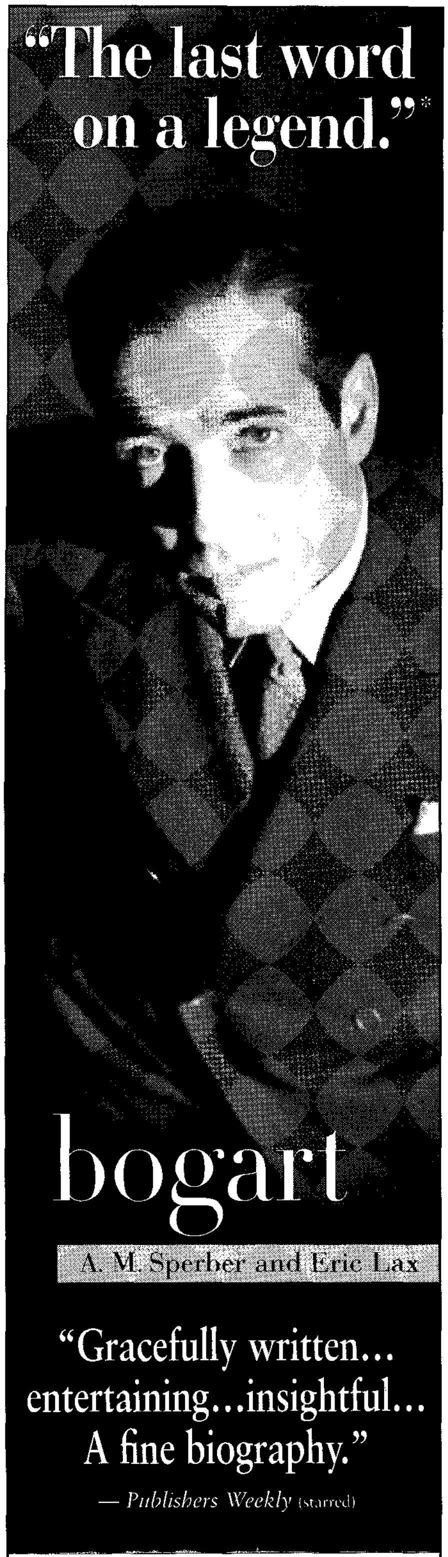
A Mongolian Tale—A story of young love and separation, based on Zhang Cheng-Zhi's 1982 novel, "Black Steed." Directed by Xie Fei. In Mongolian. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

Prisoner of the Mountains—A picture set against the background of the war in Chechnya, about two Russian soldiers captured and held in the hope of an exchange of prisoners. The director, Sergei Bodrov, unfolds his hushed brotherhood-of-man tale (which was inspired by a Tolstoy story) in a showy but poetic way, filling it with moody, haunted, compellingly fresh and beautiful images. In Russian.—B.D. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Private Parts—Howard Stern's bid for the love of millions has plenty of isolated hilarious bits, and Stern, who plays himself, is surprisingly photogenic. But the film asks us to see him as both unusually lovable and bravely moral, and that's just too much. The disingenuous screenplay, by Len Blum and Michael Kolesniko, emphasizes Stern's vulnerability and leaves out a lot of his radio show's true meanness. Mary McCormack plays his cute, clean-cut wife. Directed by Betty Thomas.—S.K. (Chelsea Cinemas, Coronet Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

The Saint—Val Kilmer, like George Sanders and Roger Moore before him, plays the suave Simon Templar, in a story of theft and political intrigue. Also starring Elisabeth Shue. Directed by Phillip Noyce. (Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema.) (Art Greenwich Twin, East 85th Street, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Olympia, State, and 34th Street Showplace.)

Secrets & Lies—Hortense (Marianne Jean-Baptiste), the heroine of Mike Leigh's broadest and most ambitious film to date, decides after the death of her adoptive mother to seek her biological one. The quest turns up Cynthia (Brenda Blethyn), who freaks out: Hortense is middle-class and black, Cynthia working-class and white. Jean-Baptiste gives a quiet, pacific performance; Blethyn deals in spasms of exaggeration which belong in another film altogether. Still, there is a fine supporting cast, and they all gather in the final scene, a cathartic barbecue that starts off as nicely choreographed light comedy and darkens to a Bergman-like chorus of wailing women and slightly overcooked dialogue.—A.L. (59th Street East Cinema, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Quad Cinema.)



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WILLIAM MORROW

Selena—A film written and directed by Gregory Nava, about the life and death of Selena Quintanilla Perez. Becky Lee Meza and Jennifer Lopez star as the singer at different ages. (84th Street Sixplex, 19th Street East 6, Olympia, Orpheum VII, State, 72nd Street East, and Village East Cinemas.)

Shine—The hero of Scott Hicks's absorbing biographical film is the Australian concert pianist David Helfgott (played, at different stages of his life, by Alex Rafalowicz, Noah Taylor, and Geoffrey Rush), who suffered a severe breakdown, spent years in mental institutions, and then, improbably, resumed his career. Although the movie's swiftness and lightness are pleasing, the over-all image they create is indistinct: it just evaporates in your head when the lights come up. Also with Armin Mueller-Stahl, Lynn Redgrave, and John Gielgud (who's in especially buoyant comic form).—T.R. (12/2/96) (Carnegie Hall Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, and The Screening Room. . . . ¶ Cinema II; through April 10.)

The Sixth Man—The extra player on a college basketball team is a ghost (Kadeem Hardison), who helps lead his brother (Marlon Wayans) and the other athletes to the N.C.A.A. Championships. Directed by Randall Miller. (Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, 86th Street East Twin, Embassy 1, Sutton, and Village Theatre VII.)

Sling Blade—Billy Bob Thornton wrote and directed this dunderheaded film, in which he plays a simpleton who, released from an asylum for the criminally insane after serving twenty-five years for the murder of his mother and her lover, returns to his poor Southern home town and ends up befriending a small boy and defending him against *his* mom's abusive boyfriend. Although the film does have two terrific actors—Dwight Yoakam, as the menacing boyfriend, and John Ritter, as a gay store manager—its critical success is mystifying; it's hard to believe that anybody could fall for its dim homilies.—B.D. (Angelika Film Center, Carnegie Hall Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, 86th Street East Twin, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Murray Hill Cinemas.)

That Old Feeling—A romantic comedy about a long-divorced couple (Bette Midler and Dennis Farina) brought together by their daughter's wedding. Directed by Carl Reiner. Screenplay by Leslie Dixon. (Chelsea Cinemas, Coronet Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, National Twin, Orpheum VII, 34th St. East, and Waverly.)

Turbo: A Power Rangers Movie—The further adventures of the teen-age action heroes who dress in blue, yellow, red, pink, and green. Directed by David Winning and Shuki Levy. (Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, and Manhattan Twin.)

Waiting for Guffman—If talent were enough, Christopher Guest's mock documentary about a small Missouri town celebrating its sesquicentennial would be one of the great recent comedies. Along with Guest, it stars such masterly offbeat character actors as Eugene Levy, Catherine O'Hara, and Bob Balaban. But satire at this length needs a fresher, fairer target than pathetic small-town piety. Guest and Levy, the co-writers, seem to have had nothing in mind beyond the kind of characters they could work up; and, without any check on their instincts, the actors often fall back on meanness.—S.K. (Cinema 3 and Village East Cinemas.)

When We Were Kings—A foolproof documentary. Then again, it's hard to see how anyone could mess up the story of the 1974 fight between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman: the drama is all there, ripe for the telling, and the director, Leon Gast, grabs the opportunity with both hands. To maintain the suspense, he enlists help from a wide range of Ali fans: George Plimpton, Spike Lee, and, above all, Norman Mailer, who talks about that night with the unabated excitement of a child.—A.L. (2/17/97) (19th Street East 6 and Lincoln Square.)

ALSO PLAYING

B.A.P.S.: Lincoln Square, Manhattan Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, State, and Village East Cinemas. . . . **BIG NIGHT** (reviewed in our issue of 9/23/96): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **BLOOD & WINE** (2/17/97): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **DAS BOOT:** Village Theatre VII. . . . **BREAKING THE WAVES** (11/18/96): Film Forum and 68th St. Playhouse. . . . **CATS DON'T DANCE:** Criterion Center and 64th and 2nd. . . . **CHILDHOOD'S END:** Quad Cinema. . . . **THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK:** Chelsea Cinemas and Village East Cinemas. . . . **FARGO** (3/25/96): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **GHOSTS OF MISSISSIPPI:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **THE GODFATHER:** Astor Plaza. . . . **JACKIE CHAN'S FIRST STRIKE:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **JERRY MAGUIRE** (12/16/96): Criterion Center and 64th and 2nd. . . . **JUNGLE 2 JUNGLE:** 86th Street East Twin and Embassy 2. . . . **LOST HIGHWAY** (3/10/97): Village Theatre VII. . . . **PINK FLAMINGOS:** Angelika Film Center. . . . **THE RELIC:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **RETURN OF THE JEDI:** Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and Ziegfeld. . . . **SMILLA'S SENSE OF SNOW** (3/10/97): Art Greenwich Twin and Beekman.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

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(For show times, call 777-FILM, except where noted.)

Angelika 57, 225 W. 57th St.
Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Carnegie Hall Cinemas, Seventh Ave. between 56th and 57th Sts.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3, 2 W. 59th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St.
Coronet Cinemas, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Criterion Center, Broadway at 44th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
Eastside Playhouse, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
86th Street East Twin, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Embassy 1, Broadway at 46th St.
Embassy 2, 3, and 4, Seventh Ave. at 47th St.
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Guild, 33 W. 50th St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St. (757-2280).
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Manhattan Twin, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
National Twin, Broadway at 44th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St.
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
Regency, Broadway at 67th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
68th St. Playhouse, Third Ave. at 68th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th St. East, 241 E. 34th St.
34th Street Showplace, 238 E. 34th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Waverly 1 and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS

(The following notes are by Pauline Kael and Michael Sragow. Theatre addresses and phone numbers appear with the listings following these notes.)

Black Legion (1936)—In 1936, there were press accounts that a new Klan had sprung up, selecting Jews, Catholics, and Communists as its targets, and Warners, always eager for topical stories, leaped in. In the movie, the organization is against foreigners in general, and Humphrey Bogart is the young factory worker who joins up in anger because a Pole got the job he wanted. He is soon involved with black sheets, masks, copper-studded whips, and guns. Though the film flaunts its cautionary message and assumes a virtuous, civics-lesson stance, the story is tacky and primitive. Tolerable, but not in a class with the best of the Warners socially conscious melodramas. Archie Mayo directed; with Ann Sheridan, Erin O'Brien-Moore, and Dick Foran.—P.K. (American Museum of the Moving Image; April 12.)

The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie (1972)—Luis Buñuel's most frivolously witty movie, directed (at the age of 72) with exhilarating ease. He is no longer savage about the hypocrisy and inanity of the privileged classes; he has grown almost fond of their follies—the way one can grow fond of the snarls and the silliness of vicious pets. This episodic story is about a group of six friends—discreetly charming amoral beasts—whose attempts to have dinner together are always being interrupted: food, that ritual center of bourgeois well-being, keeps eluding them. Buñuel keeps tweaking us, catching us up in an anecdote or a spooky death joke, and then dropping it. In French.—P.K. (Anthology Film Archives; April 9-10.)

The Love Parade (1929)—For roughly forty minutes, you can take pleasure in seeing the whorls of "the Lubitsch touch" develop within the confines of this mock-regal musical romance about the marriage of the Queen of Sylvania (Jeanette MacDonald) to a military attaché (Maurice Chevalier) who has cut a dashing swath through Paris. The opening reels are full of moments that blend the chic and the democratic, the hip and the lyrical, in a warm, generous knowingness. Chevalier croons his thanks to the Parisiennes who taught him "all that a kiss could be"; then his servant does the same, and then his dog. Chevalier never loses his effervescence, but the trilling MacDonald doesn't contribute much more to the fun than a sensational pair of legs, and, once the couple marries, the scenario devolves into a surprisingly weepy battle over who gets to wear the pants in the royal family. Screenplay by Ernest Vajda; libretto by Guy Bolton, from the play "The Prince Consort," by Léon Xanrof and Jules Chancel. Music by Victor Schertzinger; lyrics by Clifford Grey.—M.S. (Museum of Modern Art; April 13.)

Passion (1919; "Madame Du Barry")—Ernst Lubitsch's turbulent court epic did more than display his fondness for his star, Pola Negri, a dark-haired beauty with dramatic eyes and rosebud lips: it showed he could mesh wit and high style even in a period spectacular. He and Negri turn Madame Du Barry into an ideal Lubitsch antiheroine—a working-class scrambler who learns that when in Paris you do as the Parisians do. Louis XV (Emil Jannings) may kiss her toes and clip her fingernails, but she remains, to her peril, a good-hearted if amoral girl playing sexual hopscotch. Power doesn't corrupt her absolutely; for all the film's blitheness, you feel sadness and horror when her upward mobility ends at the guillotine. Fred Orbing and Hans Kräly wrote the script. Silent.—M.S. (Museum of Modern Art; April 11 and April 13.)

Trouble in Paradise (1932)—Perhaps the most shimmering of the romantic-comedy collaborations of the director Ernst Lubitsch and the writer Samson Raphaelson, this film is a make-believe world of the thirties preserved intact. Herbert Marshall plays a career jewel thief, and, as his partner, Miriam Hopkins, quick and darting, always has her feelers out, along with her kittenish claws. Kay Francis is the wealthy widow whose face takes on a yearning expression once she sees Marshall; desire makes her warm and languid. The movie is full of suave maneuvers and magical switcheroos; in its light-as-a-feather way, it's perfection.—P.K. (Museum of Modern Art; April 11-12.)

Miriam Hopkins and Herbert Marshall in "Trouble in Paradise."

KOBAL COLLECTION

LATE RUNS, CLASSICS, ETC.

(Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.)

Film Forum 2, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—April 9: A program of musical short films from the thirties, including "Paree, Paree" (1932) and "Office Blues" (1932). . . . April 10: "Swing Time" (1936, George Stevens) and "Top of the Town" (1937, Ralph Murphy). . . . From April 11: "Woman in the Dunes" (1964, Hiroshi Teshigahara; in Japanese).

Museum of Modern Art, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—April 10 at 3 and 6: "Stockhausen's Originale: Doubletakes" (1964-94, Peter Moore). . . . ¶ A program of films starring Israeli actress Gila Almagor; in Hebrew, with English subtitles. April 10 at 6 and April 13 at 2: "The Summer of Aviya" (1988, Eli Cohen). . . . April 10 at 8:15 and April 13 at 5: "Under the Domim Tree" (1995, Cohen). . . . April 11 and April 14 at 2:30: "Magic" (1994, Shmuel Hasfari). . . . April 11 and April 13 at 6: "Siege" (1969, Gilberto Tofano). . . . April 11 at 8 and April 15 at 2:30: "Life According to Agfa" (1992, Assi Dayan). . . . April 12 at 2: "Passover Fever" (1995, Shemi Zarhin). . . . April 12 at 5 and April 15 at 6: "The House on Chelouche Street" (1973, Moshe Mizrahi). . . . ¶ Five films directed by Ernst Lubitsch and set in Paris, or referring to it. April 11 at 3: "So This Is Paris" (1926; silent, with French intertitles). . . . April 11 at 6 and April 13 at 5: "Passion" (†). . . . April 11 at 8:15 and April 12 at 2:30: "Trouble in Paradise" (†). . . . April 12 at 5: "Ninotchka" (1939). . . . April 13 at 2:30: "The Love Parade" (†).

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (875-5600)—A program of films directed by Philippe Garrel; all in French, with English subtitles. April 9 at 2 and 6:15 and April 10 at 8:15: "Les Baisers de Secours" (1988). . . . April 9 at 4 and 8:15: "Marie Pour Mémoire" (1967). . . . April 10 at 2 and 6:15: "The Birth of Love" (1993). . . . April 10 at 4: "I Don't Hear the Guitar Anymore" (1990). . . . ¶ A program of Danish films; most in Danish, with English subtitles. April 11 at 2 and April 15 at 6:15: "The Boys from St. Petri" (1991, Søren Kragh-Jacobsen). . . . April 11 at 4:30 and 9 and April 12 at 6:15: "Heroes" (1996, Thomas Vinterberg). . . . April 11 at 6:30 and April 12 at 4: "Portland" (1996, Niels Arden Oplev). . . . April 12 at 8:45 and April 15 at 4: "Pusher" (1996, Nikolas Winding Refn). . . . April 13 at 4:30: "Blind Justice" (1915, Benjamin Christensen; silent). . . . April 13 at 7: "Hamsun" (1996, Jan Troell). . . . April 15 at 2 and 8:30: "The Eighteenth" (1996, Anders Rønnow-Klarlund). . . . ¶ Weekend showings for children. April 12-13 at 2: "The Eye of the Eagle" (1997, Peter Flinth).

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St.—April 10 at 7:30: "Coffee with Lemon" (1994, Leonid Gorovetz; in Russian and Hebrew). For information about free tickets, call 687-9141. . . . ¶ From April 14, The 3rd Avignon/New York Film Festival 97, eight days of French and American independent films (including film tributes to Marcel Carné, Richard Brooks, and John Sayles), seminars, and discussions. (For information, call 355-6160.)

Anthology Film Archives, 32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—April 9-10 at 7, April 12-13 at 4, and April 15 at 7: "The Kingdom" (1994, Lars Von Trier). . . . ¶ Films by Luis Buñuel. April 9-10 at 4 and 8: "The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie" (†). . . . April 9-10 at 6 and 10: "That Obscure Object of Desire" (1977). . . . April 11 at 8 and April 12-13 at 4 and 8: "Diary of a Chambermaid" (1963). . . . April 11 at 10 and April 12-13 at 6 and 10: "Belle de Jour" (1966). . . . April 14 at 6 and 9:15: "Daughter of Deceit" (1951). . . . April 14 at 7:30 and 10:45: "The Daughter of Juan Simon" (1935). . . . April 15 at 8: "Don Quintin el Amargao" (1935). . . . April 15 at 10: "Republic of Sin" (1959).

American Museum of the Moving Image, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—A program of films starring Humphrey Bogart. April 12 at 2: "The Petrified Forest" (1936, Archie Mayo). . . . April 12 at 3:45: "Dead End" (1937, William Wyler). . . . April 12 at 5:30: "Black Legion" (†). . . . April 13 at 2: "The Big Sleep" (1946, Howard Hawks). . . . April 13 at 4:30: "Dark Passage" (1947, Delmer Daves).

Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (864-5400)—A series of musical films, each preceded by a short cabaret performance featuring the music of the film's composer. April 15 at 7:30: David Staller will sing songs by George and Ira Gershwin, followed by "An American in Paris" (1951, Vincente Minnelli).

A Different Light Bookstore, 151 W. 19th St.—A Sunday-night series of free films (and popcorn). On April 13 at 7, the feature will be "Murderers' Row" (1966, Henry Levin).

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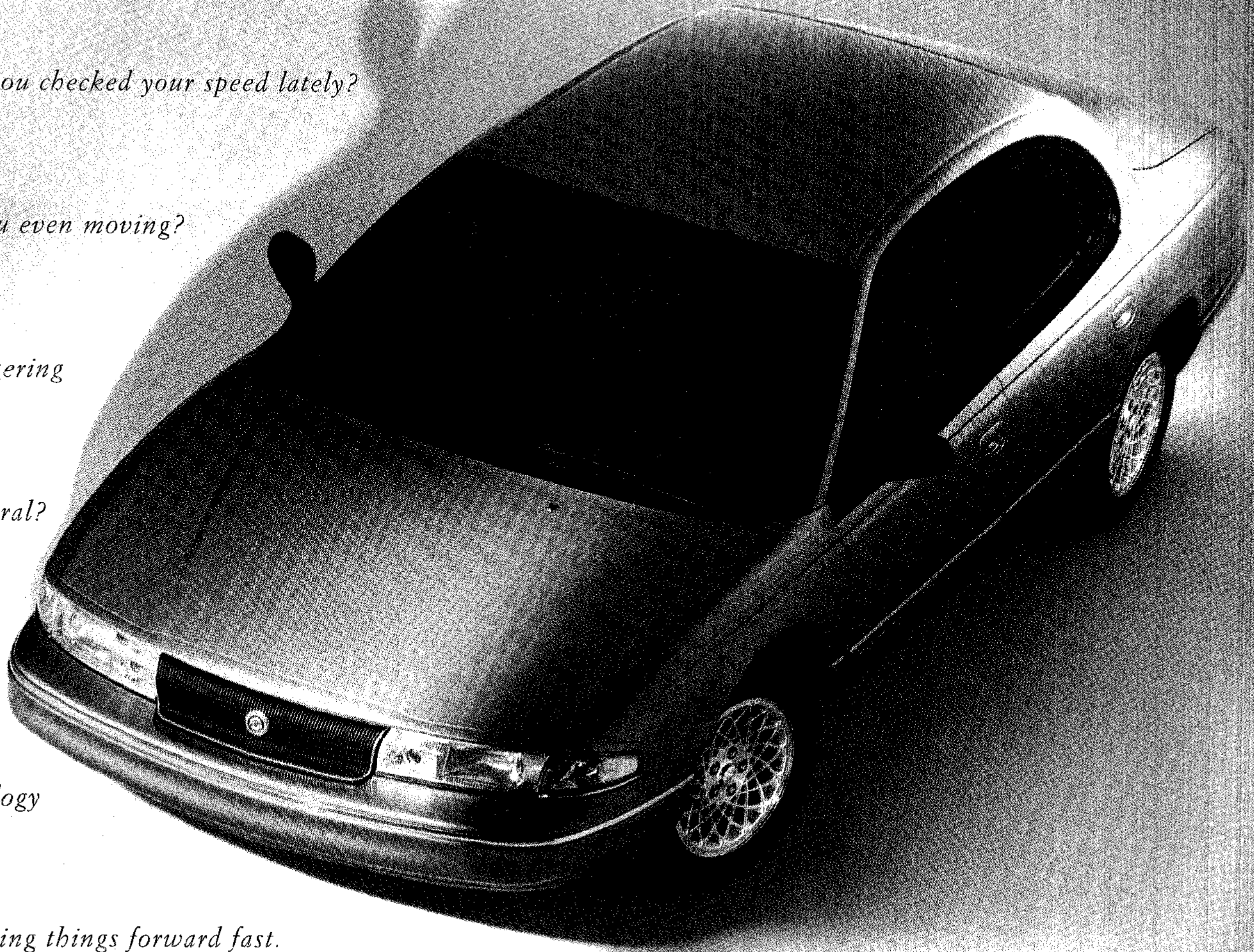

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THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

DE-PROGRAMMING HEAVEN'S GATE

The Wrong Stuff

IN January, when Hale-Bopp was too dim and distant to be seen readily with the unaided eye, two members of the Heaven's Gate commune walked into a telescope-and-camera shop in Oceanside, California, and, for three thousand six hundred and forty-five dollars, purchased a telescope to observe the comet—which they believed might be accompanied by a gigantic alien spacecraft that would, as they put it on their Web site, "take us home to . . . the literal Heavens."

Several days later, the two men returned the telescope. Last week, Mike Fowler, the store manager who dealt with them, remembered, "They said, 'Well, gosh, we found the comet, but we can't see anything following it.' I said, 'That's because there's nothing there.' "

Fowler, a knowledgeable amateur astronomer, had heard that rumors of aliens shadowing the comet were circulating on the Internet, and he understood that they were based on nothing more substantial than a flawed digital image taken by an observer in Texas, which made a background star look something like the planet Saturn. "They seemed dejected," Fowler recalled. "We try not to tread on anyone's convictions, and here we had kind of crushed their belief." Although store policy is to allow only store credit on returned merchandise, Fowler, feeling sympathetic, gave the two a refund to their credit-card account, less a ten-per-cent restocking fee.

"We were trying to get these guys to enjoy not just the comet but other things—the whole of astronomy," Fowler said, sounding wistful. "They did say they'd observed Saturn, and that it was beautiful. But they were more intent on seeing a companion to the comet. It seemed somewhat odd."

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JARRETT HUDDLESTON

Indeed. The saddening syllogism of Marshall Herff Applewhite and his followers seems to have gone like this: We think that an alien spaceship is trailing the comet; observation through a capable telescope shows no such spaceship; therefore, let's get rid of the telescope.

Stripped to its essentials, the question of what happened at Rancho Santa Fe looks less like a psychopathological riddle and more like an object lesson in the hazards of living a life innocent of empirical rigor. It may be true that the "classmates," as they called themselves, were led astray by brainwashing, a decline in organized religion, or an erosion of family values. But it's hard to avoid the reflection that the mass suicide might have been averted had just one of the observers declared, "Gee, the evidence fails to support our belief. Maybe the belief is wrong!"

It is a sobering fact that the most intensely scientific century in all human history has also been a time when tens of millions of people have perished at the hands of leaders who were unwilling to alter their presumptions according to objective evidence. Historians are still arguing about whether more people died because of Hitler's delusions than because of Stalin's or Mao's, but the death count amassed by just these three pillars of unblinking zeal is sufficient to rival, if not surpass, the multitudes whose lives were saved by science.

Not that brutality would be banished were everyone to take to heart Oliver Cromwell's famous advice to the Scottish Kirk: "I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken." After all, Cromwell himself perpetrated two of the worst massacres to have befallen Ireland.

Though science is stronger today than when Galileo knelt before the Inquisition, it remains a minority habit of mind, and its future is very much in doubt. Blind belief rules the millennial universe, dark and rangy as space itself.

The Joy of No Sex

"APPLEWHITE was so alienated from his homosexuality that he was teaching people not to have sex," the Washington *Post* reported under the headline "CRISIS OF SEXUALITY

LAUNCHED STRANGE JOURNEY." Much of the press chimed in, using language like "bizarre religious beliefs" and "ritual sacrifices" to explain what at first seemed utterly inexplicable. In fact, there is much historical evidence that behind what Applewhite and his followers were doing was a good deal more than sexual self-loathing, and that, when viewed in a certain light, there was nothing so out of the ordinary about their rituals, castration and all.

Many of the news reports could have been describing the workings of a Benedictine monastery; the cult's daily regimen suggested nothing so much as the rules that have long governed important parts of the Christian monastic tradition. Asceticism has appealed to the followers of many different faiths, in the belief that the renunciation of physical pleasure will enable them to be released from the body to find union with the divine. In Matthew 19:12, Jesus praises men who "made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake." Ancient-church historians relate how some early Christians—notably the great church father Origen—castrated themselves in their enthusiasm to follow Jesus' teaching. Castration never became an orthodox practice, but St. Paul advocated chastity—its cousin—as an ideal form of spiritual devotion.

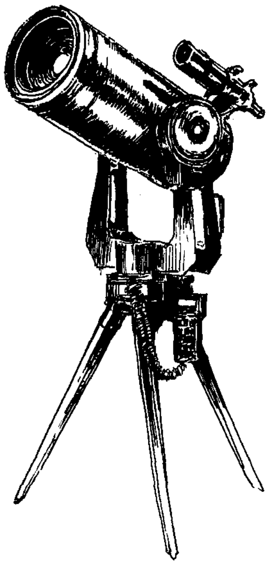
That the press singled out the regulating of sexual desire as the most telling feature of Applewhite's regime of bodily discipline reflects the distinctly modern conviction that sexuality—and especially sexual dysfunction—is at the core of the self. If the secret of Applewhite's creed was his repressed homosexuality, there must be several million more Applewhites out there, roaming the earth in search of disciples.

Flying Metaphors

The march of technology has not made religious belief any easier, but it has provided a lot of useful metaphors. The Spiritualism movement, for example, which began with the famous "rapping" sounds heard by the Fox sisters in their house outside Rochester, New York, in 1848, was greatly assisted by the new technologies of electricity and telegraphy; the ability to communicate in real time with those who were not physically present gave credibility to the notion that the living could speak with the dead. Not surprisingly, among the great men frequently summoned from the grave by psychics was Benjamin Franklin.

Applewhite's appropriation of flying-saucer metaphors was what elevated him from believer to prophet. This happened in the heyday of U.F.O.-ism—the early seventies—when he encountered Bonnie Lu Trusdale Nettles, a psychic associated with a Houston Theosophical society, who had recently gone from communicating with old-fashioned "higher beings" and "mahatmas" to channelling "space brothers." Applewhite not only acquired her lingo (resurrection became "beaming up") but converted the cheeriness of U.F.O.ism—all those groovy E.T.s promising to save the planet with their techno wisdom—into a threat: bad aliens were coming to destroy the world, and the only way to survive was to escape with the good ones.

J. Gordon Melton, who is the director of the Institute for the Study of American Religion, estimates the number of today's U.F.O. cults at around twenty—a sharp drop from the seventies. The largest group is the well-named Raelists, founded by a Canadian channeller named Claude Rael, who claims that his father was an alien. According to the group's Web site, it has thirty-five thousand adherents worldwide. In contrast to the principles of Heaven's Gate, the basic tenet of the Raelists' faith is that, since aliens really like sex, humans should have a lot more of it.



"It isn't that America is becoming more secular—this country reeks of religion," Professor Martin Marty, a historian of American religion at the University of Chicago, points out. "Americans will say, 'I'm not religious, I don't like church. I'm *spiritual*.' " The time is ripe, he says, for new technological metaphors to inspire the next generation of cult leaders. "What's different from the mid-nineteenth century," he adds, "is that the centers of spiritualism are now in high-technology communities, like Santa Fe, San Diego, Boulder, and Berkeley."

Although Applewhite used the Net to spread his religion, he didn't try to incorporate network technology into his rhetoric. Like technology itself, spiritual discourse that cribs from scientific trendiness can go stale pretty quickly. One reason that Applewhite beamed up when he did may have been that his flying-saucer metaphors had finally conked out.

Johnny One-Note

In christening himself Do and his female companion Ti, the late Applewhite used an apt musical metaphor to indicate his authority over the Heaven's Gate cult. As a former opera singer and choirmaster, he knew the age-old system of associating syllables with notes—Do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, and ti. This method, called "solmization," inducts beginners into the hierarchy of tonality. Do, or C, is the fundamental note, the ground of all overtones, the beginning and end of the scale. Ti, or B, is the leading tone, usually compelled to resolve back to C. (Old-fashioned male chauvinism apparently lingered in this New Age cult.) Heaven's Gate also sent out E-mails to news groups under the name Lah, representing the tuning note A; perhaps Applewhite was trying to tune the world to his off-center pitch.

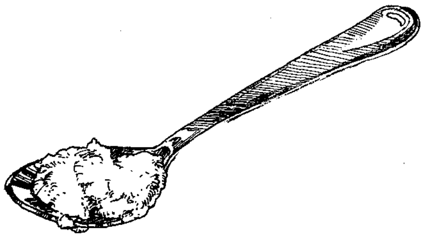
But what key was he in? These white-key notes could also spell a darker A minor. Composers have had widely differing ideas about what tone might be the truly fundamental one, the axis of the Pythagorean music of the spheres. The dawn-of-creation music in Wagner's "Das Rheingold" starts on a subterranean E-flat. Two of Bruckner's symphonies begin with a mysterious, hovering D. In Mahler's First Symphony all the strings play unearthly harmonics on A. Terry Riley's cultish "In C" has a pianist play thousands of C's in sequence.

Applewhite's musical tastes varied, but he might sensibly have favored Aleksandr Scriabin, the great Russian mystic. Scriabin, obsessed with the properties of particular tones, pictured the scale as a spectrum of color, sensation, and spiritual essence. His mercifully unfinished masterwork "Mysterium," slated for a première at the foot of the Himalayas, was expected to bring about nothing less than the annihilation of the universe; men and women would reëmerge as astral souls, relieved of sexual difference and lifted onto a pure spiritual plane. What key he wanted for the end is not clear, but fade-to-white C is a good guess.

Have a Nice Day

THE mass suicide at Rancho Santa Fe touches an unusual nerve—not because it reminds us of Jonestown or Waco but because it doesn't. These cultists weren't snaggle-haired isolates waiting for the black helicopters, and they weren't trailer-park loonies storing an arsenal. They lived in a fancy neighborhood; they were articulate, even eloquent; they had marketable skills. They liked applesauce. And they certainly kept a neat house.

More striking still was the way their outlandish creed often intersected with what might be called the majority culture. They believed that they were not their bodies, and so do we all. Haven't most of us been reared to value character over skin color, virtue over physical beauty, the victory of will and perseverance over anatomical difficulty? The notion of a soul incarnated in a cumbersome biological crate is common to Christian devouts, Buddhist priests, Islamic sages, Hindu adepts, and suicide bombers of every stripe. All religions are about trading up, as it were; what was bizarre about the Heaven's Gate theology was the conviction that, by dying, you could turn in your run-down old "vehicle" for a shiny new Container from Outer Space—one that was free of such troubling appurtenances as sexuality and, apparently, hair. It is hard to imagine how strapping on your Nikes and packing up your suitcase might expedite the deal (though the ancient Egyptians would probably have understood). It is less hard to imagine why the cultists felt at home cruising the Internet: cyberspace is already a place where you can leave your body behind and travel vast distances. (And, besides, the Total Overcomers knew how beaming up worked. They were Trekkies; they'd seen it on TV.)



We are told that children, in their innocence, have difficulty distinguishing between fantasy and reality. Certainly Marshall Herff Applewhite, with his Mister Rogers singsong and his fondness for nicknames like Bo and Peep, had wide-eyed innocence down cold. Listening to him gently tell us we will probably, in our ignorance, mistake him for a cult leader, one had to admire his debating technique: he knew all about disarming criticism by preëmpting it. Of all the gurus who have recently invaded the popular imagination, he was surely the most highly developed master of spin.

The Long Goodbye

ACCORDING to the theory of memes—which is the study of infectious ideas—there are two primary ways for an up-and-coming religious group to get its message out. The first is through "proselytic transmission"—i.e., knocking on doors and winning over converts. The second is through what the physicist Aaron Lynch has called "quantity parental transmission," meaning that you encourage your converts to have as many children as possible. The all but extinct Shakers were very good at the former but terrible at the latter, since they required celibacy. The Hutterites have been indifferent to the former but great at quantity parental, averaging something like ten children per couple. Other sects—the Mormons, the Lubavitchers—have multiplied by following both strategies.

The strange thing about Heaven's Gate is that it was no good at either one. In the early years, when Applewhite went on the road promoting his vision, he failed to stir up much interest; in the end, he stopped knocking on doors entirely. And, if you consider the castration business, the last thing he seems to have been interested in was propagation. This was a cult that insisted on exclusivity. It was, in effect, an anti-meme meme. Of course, one particularly postmodern irony is that nothing is more infectious than an idea intended not to be infectious—nothing is more desirable than what's behind the velvet rope. The Heaven's Gate Web site is now jammed. The goodbye videos have probably been seen by more people than "Liar Liar." To the aforementioned memes, perhaps we should add a third: "extinction transmission"—the art of spreading your message throughout the world by very conspicuously leaving it. ♦

"The Wrong Stuff," Timothy Ferris; "The Joy of No Sex," George Chauncey; "Flying Metaphors," John Seabrook; "Johnny One-Note," Alex Ross; "Have a Nice Day," Stephen Schiff; "The Long Goodbye," Malcolm Gladwell.

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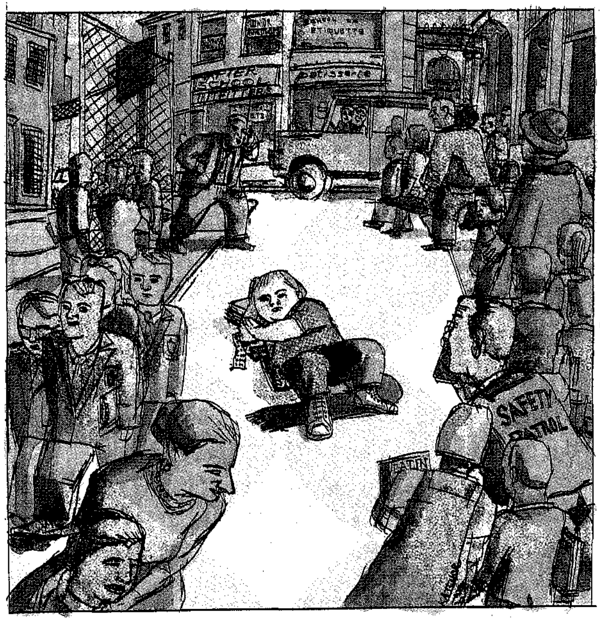
ANNALS OF PARENTHOOD

MAKING THE GRADE

Going to private school is increasingly hard work—for the parents.

BY JAMES ATLAS

At three o'clock on a drizzly weekday afternoon, I stand on the corner of Madison and Ninety-sixth in an orange nylon vest, with a whistle hanging around my neck, clutching a walkie-talkie and scanning the street for signs of trouble—gangs of teen-age thugs, lurkers in raincoats, any ripple of urban disorder that could menace the homebound journey of the boys of St. Bernard's School. I'm on Safety Patrol. Armed with a pamphlet of instructions on "What to Do in Case of an Emergency," I'm in a state of wary preparation, and so is my partner on this blustery day—a cardiologist, whose son is in my son's class, and who has probably left a few bypass candidates lying in intensive care, waiting for a pig's valve to be installed in their chests, while he's out making Carnegie Hill safe for our children.



BEN KATCHOR

I like wearing this vest and hearing the self-important crackle of the walkie-talkie as I stride about the Upper East Side, bantering with mothers and nannies and tradesmen like a neighborhood cop on the beat. It imbues me with an aura of authority. And kids do get assaulted from time to time: just a few months ago, there was an incident near Nightingale-Bamford, my daughter's school, four blocks away. But sometimes I wonder why, in addition to the huge tuition I'm paying, I have to suit up in the vestments of a crossing guard in the middle of a workday and trudge up and down Madison Avenue for two hours in the rain. "I give them fifteen thousand long ones a year," one mother complained to me. "I have to put on a bright-orange mommy poncho, too?"

I'm back in the office by five—not too bad, really. (I've been known to come back at this hour from a long lunch.) But the next afternoon I'm supposed to be on duty again, attending a meeting of the school Library Committee. Boy, am I busy! What with serving as a sommelier at the Fathers Who Cook dinner, attending "the first Class VII Parents in Action Meeting," lacing up my kids' Chargers on Great Skate Night at Wollman Rink, attending a performance of "Iolanthe," and hawking raffle tickets for the school fund drive door to door in our building, who has time for work? Sometimes I fret: Which stocks are tanking while the broker from Goldman, Sachs is at his daughter's basketball game? What perp is on the loose while the district attorney organizes the Father-Daughter Breakfast? Can the citizenry of New York City afford to have the parents of school-age children keeping these indentured-servant hours?

On Parents' Night at Nightingale, the headmistress delivered a stern tripartite admonition: make sure your children read; make sure they don't get overscheduled; and, lastly, stay home more. Be there for them. Fine: I'm sick of going out. But how can I stay home when I have to attend the annual Fathers' Dinner at the University Club and the Parents' Potluck Supper? Then, there's the New Parents' Breakfast, and C.A.F.E.—Cultural Awareness for Everyone night. "My daughter walks in the door from school, and I'm rushing off to a Parents-and-Partnership Tea," one mother says. "The whole thing is nuts."

It's a full-time job, being a parent these days. You're always *on*. "Every time I drop my kid off at school, I feel as if I'd just been to a cocktail party," a Spence dad says. The rules are: no jogging suit, no rumpled shirt, no spotted corduroys. The other day, I was standing on the corner with my son at seven-thirty in the morning, waiting for a crosstown bus and munching on a doughnut, when another dad pulled up in his Range Rover and offered us a ride. As I slid in next to him, admiring his nailhead suit, I noticed with horror the dusting of powdered sugar on my sweatpants. What would the parents of St. Bernard's think of me? Would my slovenliness hurt my kid's reputation at school? We're all in this together.

The obsession with every detail of our children's lives is largely a private-school phenomenon. My parents rarely entered the public schools in the Midwest where I got my education. I'm certain they attended the fourth-grade performance of "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" at Ravinia School (I had the part of Dopey, and wore one of my mother's silk stockings on my head); and I believe I can reliably place them at Field Day, cheering me on in the hundred-yard dash. But that's about it. They never showed up on Parents' Visiting Day, the way I do, cramming into an overheated classroom on the Upper East Side with thirty other parents who've taken the morning off to audit a class discussion on slave conditions in the Old South. There *was* no Parents' Day. "My mother only went to school to vote," a mother from Michigan confirms.

And there weren't all these parent-teacher conferences, either—these Get to Know Your Children's Teacher Nights. I'd be surprised if my parents even knew my teachers' names. That was the joy of it: back in the fifties and sixties, the relationships you had with your teachers were your own business. "Wasn't everyone you know saved by that one English teacher who gave you a glimpse of a better life?" asks a mother who grew up in a New England mill town and now works in publishing. "Mine would invite me over for espresso after school and give me books to read." I had one of those, too—a fierce-eyed woman with a burning love of Dylan Thomas. She once appeared at my door when I was home sick and sat at the kitchen table with me correcting the page proofs of *Word Mosaic*, the school literary magazine. Today, she'd probably be afraid of getting sued for sexual harassment of a minor. And where was my mother during this editing session? Out.

I'm not saying they weren't good parents. It's just that they were largely absent—the norm in those days, when kids bicycled to school unsupervised and idled away their afternoons in front of the neighborhood candy store without their parents' having to worry that they would be kidnapped by some crazed child molester out on parole. The world was safe—or safer, anyway, than it is now. As for the neighborhood candy store, it has gone the way of the soda fountain and the drive-in movie. When I was ten years old, I hung out at Strauss's, where you could buy a strip of Candy Buttons—dabs of candy on a scroll of white paper—for five cents; thirty-seven years later, I stop in at Canard, the gourmet-food shop around the corner from my daughter's school, to pick up an after-school snack of petits fours and designer lollipops: the bill comes to twelve ninety-five.

Field trips have changed, too. My children come home and report that they've attended a lecture on Egyptian hieroglyphics at the Metropolitan Museum or a master violin class at Carnegie Hall; parents are expected to serve as chaperons on these excursions. The only field trip I can recall going on as a child was to Dewey's Dairy Farm: I patted a cow. There were no mothers on the bus.

Where were our parents, anyway? The dads arrived home late for dinner after a long commute, their bulging briefcases filled with work; the mothers did errands all day, or sweated in the laundry room making piles of sock balls. It didn't bother me that they weren't around: solitude was sweet. Today, sitting at the counter of Starbucks in my orange vest on a coffee break, I have a memory of the last time I wore one: forty years ago, when I was a patrol boy in Highland Park, Illinois, wielding a big red "Stop" sign at an in-

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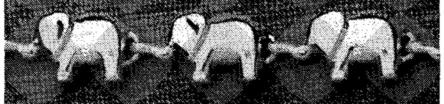

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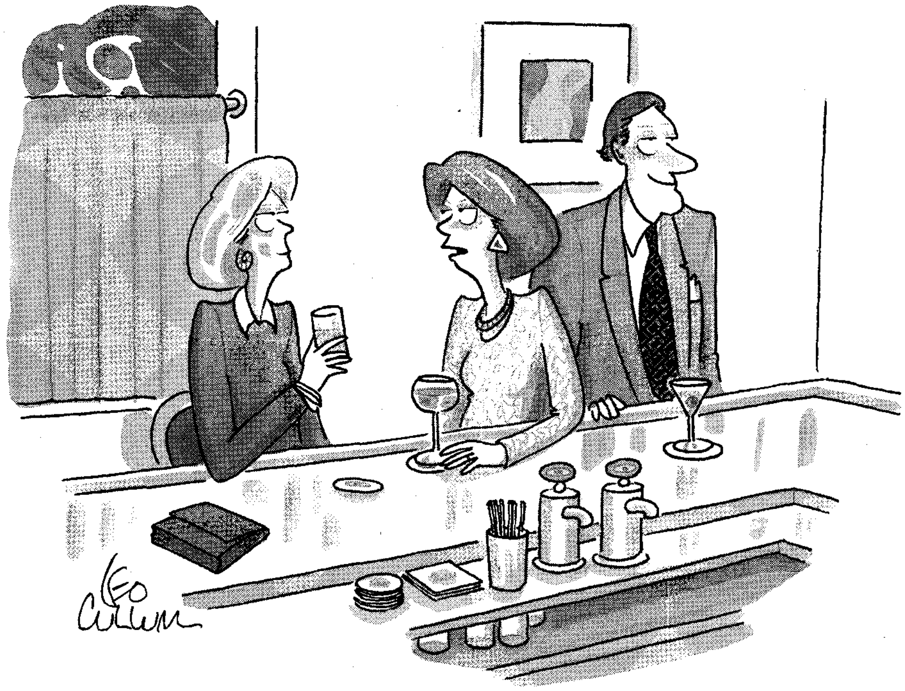


“He looks very trim, but he’s got eighty grams of fat in his head.”

• •

tersection several blocks from school. After the last kid crossed, I dawdled up the empty street, legally late and happy to be alone. Alone: that’s how I remember my childhood. “A yellow school bus took us to school and took us home, we played in the back yard by ourselves,” a father who grew up on Long Island recalls. “My parents had their own lives to live. Their goal was linoleum on the floor.” More than a few parents of my generation report their own parents’ bewilderment over our neurotic absorption in our children: “Why do you make such a big deal over how your kids *feel* all the time? I never worried about how you felt. I worried about how *I* felt.”

There certainly wasn’t so much equipment back then. On Fridays, I lug to school a duffelbag stuffed with gear for my son’s hockey practice: shoulder pads, knee pads, elbow pads, mouth guard, helmet, padded pants, crotch cup, jersey, gloves. An astronaut could suit up faster. Wrestling his bag onto the bus, I think back to my own hockey days, in a public grammar school: the rink was a rough oval of splintered wooden boards and bumpy ice. My uniform consisted of a nylon ski parka, a hockey stick, and a pair of plastic shin guards. The games were pickup, and ended when it was dark. I walked home with my skates tied together by the laces and dangling from the end of my stick like a hobo’s bundle. I was happy.

“THE era of the child,” as sociologists refer to our offspring-centered age, is fairly new. For centuries, no one paid much attention to children. Too many died, for one thing. American frontier parents, knowing that maybe two-thirds of their children weren’t going to make it, developed a prophylactic indifference. In Europe, neglect was a given. As Philippe Ariès documents in his classic “Centuries of Childhood,” children in the Middle Ages were relegated to the lowly status of beggars. In pre-Revolutionary France, children were third-class citizens: they weren’t to be heard *or* seen. Hustled off to a wet nurse in the provinces the minute they were born, they returned home at the age of three or four and disappeared into the scullery to be looked after by the help; on formal occasions they were decked out in elaborate costumes and briefly paraded in front of their parents before being remanded to the servants. The novelty of Rousseau’s famous book “Émile, ou de l’Éducation” was its radical argument that parents *should* notice their children. “What is this rich man, this busy father, doing?” Rousseau taunted, deploring the use of tutors as surrogate parents. “Paying another man to discharge those duties which are peculiarly his. Venal soul! Can you believe money will buy your son another father?”

By the nineteenth century, the notion that families should have as little as possible to do with children had been institutionalized in the rise of the boarding school. Ariès explains, “The school was substituted for society in which all the ages were mingled together; it was called upon to mould children on the pattern of an ideal human type.” To this day, the chattering classes in Britain maintain a laissez-faire attitude toward their children’s education. A friend whose three daughters attend the posh Dragon School, in Oxford, invokes a household rule: “No attending a play unless the child has ten lines or more.”

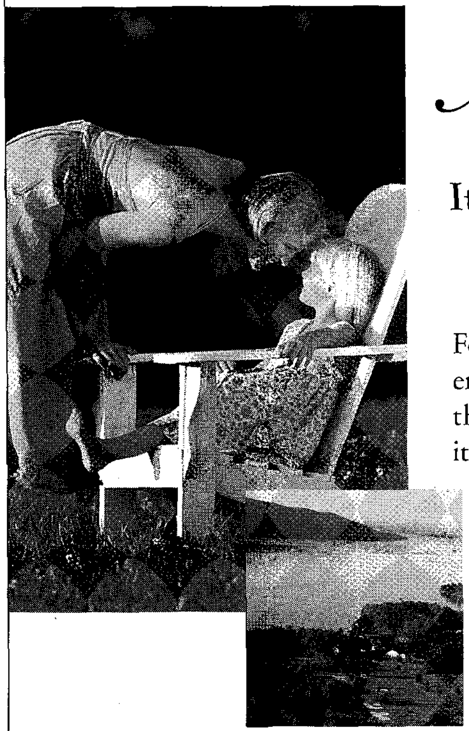
It’s only in America that—to cite the title of the famous Delmore Schwartz story—“The Child Is the Meaning of This Life.” We’ve made a fetish out of schooling. Partly, I think, this has to do with the general fanaticism of Americans: getting it right, or trying to, is a dottily endearing national trait. Whether it’s marriage or children or health or religion, we’re compulsively pragmatic. In our child-rearing, this “perfectibility of man” aspiration manifests itself in a whole array of goods and services: private coaching sessions to boost S.A.T. scores, camps for the overweight, manners tutoring for the Park Avenue set. I have in hand a brochure from the Barclay Classes, which offer instruction in the “practice of good manners” and “all phases of ballroom dancing.” You can even send your children to a hotel in Florida where they’re taught how to invest in the stock market. When I was nine years old, my grandma Rae gave me five shares of Motorola. “Hey, Mom, it’s up a third!” I’d cry, poring over the stock pages of the *Sun-Times* as I gobbled Wheaties in our breakfast nook.

Of course, it’s easy to make fun of all this nervous striving on behalf of our children, but we have reason to worry. As Olivier Bernier noted in “Pleasure and Privilege,” his brilliant history of late-eighteenth-century Europe and America, “middle-class children would one day be expected to earn money and further the family fortunes: they had to be educated accordingly.” The children of Park Avenue are probably safe for another generation or two of drowsing over their

Latin conjugations, but my kids *have* to succeed. There's no trust fund, no financial safety net. "A lot of people out there are one step away from being downsized," says Dr. Robert Evans, a psychologist and school consultant based in Wellesley, Massachusetts; his specialty is parents in the nineties. "This is the first time that white-collar families have had the economic worries that blue-collar parents have always had. You know that Bob Dylan line? 'Twenty years of schoolin' and they put you on the day shift.' " No wonder those of us caught in the middle—somewhere between the privileged and the working classes—care so much about which nursery school our kids attend: where they are at the age of four can determine where they are at the age of forty. (This is why France and England don't share our pedagogic mania: the more rigid the class structure, the more indifferent a society is to education.)

But it's not just fear of falling through the middle-class safety net that makes us pushy; it's who we are. The parents of the nineties are the children of the sixties. We have insanely high expectations, and our kids represent another sphere in which to achieve. One school administrator complains, "I'm amazed that parents will call me up and demand that their children change sections: 'I want Johnny in Level 1 Math!' Never mind that Johnny can't *do* Level 1 Math." The parents' attitude is, Hey, we're paying for this. "They have a greater sense of entitlement," the administrator says. "They want more bang for their buck."

I can see why. Membership in the Leadership Gift Club at my daughter's school will cost you from nineteen hundred and twenty dollars for the 1920 Founders' Society all the way up to fifteen thousand for the 75th Anniversary Circle. Private schools actually list your donation in a pamphlet, classified by how much you gave. (Thank God for the $1-$499 category.) You're also supposed to participate in auctions and benefits—"An Evening on Broadway," "The Saturday Jamboree"—designed to extract still more cash. And then my wife and I pay out somewhere between forty-five and seventy-five dollars several times a year so that our daughter can attend "charity dances." The money goes to good causes—community-service centers and children's-cancer wards—but



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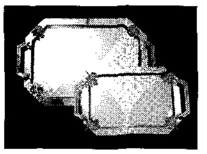

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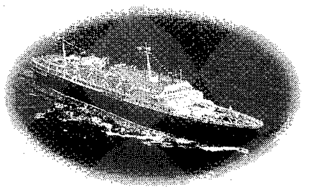

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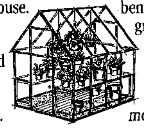

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a quick run-through on the calculator tots up almost another thousand a year in the debit column. At least we're spared on Grandparents' Visiting Day, when pitches are made to *our* parents, half of whom have probably just finished paying off the debt they accumulated while they were putting us through school, and need whatever small nest egg remains to pay for the nursing home. Sometimes I get the feeling that the militant emphasis on school togetherness is just another way of priming the donation pump. (In fairness, tuition doesn't cover the costs at these schools; it generally falls several thousand dollars short per student—a million dollars a year short, all told, at my son's school. "Endowment income and annual giving of remarkable proportions make up the rest," the headmaster of St. Bernard's wrote in an elegant letter accompanying this year's fee schedule.)

Forking over all this dough doesn't get you off the hook. An admissions officer told me, "I've added a question to the application: What kind of parents are they going to be? Are they going to be active parents, or are they just going to be *nudges*?" The pressure to maintain a high profile is hard to ignore—especially for mothers. "You're punished if you don't show up at school functions," one high-powered-lawyer mom said to me bitterly. "There's this kind of accusatory 'Why wasn't she at the mailing on Thursday?' " The mothers who don't work feel threatened by the ones who do; the ones who do feel guilty. "The less time they spend with their children, the more they need to believe they're in control," an administrator says. "It's like 'No, I didn't see my child today, but I spoke to her French teacher.' " Parents don't establish rules at home, Dr. Evans notes. They're lax about "boundary-setting." And the less they discipline their children the more likely they are to call in a lawyer as soon as there's a conflict: "If a kid comes home and complains, 'Miss Smith was mean to me,' the parent no longer says, in the old-fashioned way, 'What did you do to Miss Smith?' but 'What did Miss Smith do?' They're not prepared to have a child work out a difficult situation on his own."

This parental hyper-involvement isn't confined to the weird precincts of Manhattan. It's a class thing. At Francis Parker, a private school on the North Side of Chicago, parental attendance at "morning exes" (morning exercises, or the nineties version of assembly) is virtually required. Celebrated Parker parents—among them the diva Catherine Malfitano and the movie critic Gene Siskel—are recruited for question-and-answer sessions in the school cafeteria. In L.A., where thirty or forty children are competing for each place in high-prestige toddler groups, the family applies as a unit. "It's what the parents bring to the party," a producer says. "There are cadres of mothers who 'do' school. That's their career—and they're just as aggressive about it as any studio head."

PUBLIC-SCHOOL families have the opposite problem. The schools are going broke, and parents are an ever-diminishing presence. The publicity literature of the National PTA is defiantly upbeat, featuring a clutch of beaming kids on the cover of its annual report, but the graph of "membership in millions" tells a different story: it's down from 11.93 in 1960 to 7.02 in 1990. Most working parents don't have time for the PTA—they're too busy making ends meet.

Public schools in prosperous neighborhoods seem to be exempt from this trend. "We're all big volunteers," one mother who lives on Chicago's affluent North Shore told me. The school lunches are served by parents; the teams are coached by the dads. But the parents don't do these things just out of enthusiasm; they're helping to compensate for the lack of government funds. "It's all about dwindling dollars and escalating costs," the Chicago mother says. "The teachers' salaries consume eighty per cent of the budget. Who's paying for foreign-language programs? The PTA!"

I shouldn't complain: the education I'm paying so dearly for is far superior to the one I had. When I drop off my daughter at school and see the girls trooping through the doors in their navy-blue skirts, their backpacks crammed with Latin and French textbooks, I'm stunned by how crisp and professional the place is. It wasn't like this at my old grammar school, with its gloomy corridors and dust-bowl athletic field, the El train rumbling past. My daughter can rattle off the causes of the Revolutionary War; her best friend produced an oral report on Islamic medicine in the Middle Ages.

"She comes home and talks about 'Great Expectations,' " a Brearley dad says in bewilderment. "Last night, her homework assignment was to write a theme on class-consciousness in Victorian England—in 'Dickensian style'!" I memorized the names of the Presidents and nearly burned our house down baking fake parchment paper in the oven.

The children aren't the only ones who benefit. Despite my doubts about whether I'm up to the job, my kids' schools have become my surrogate community. One of the anomalies of New York life is how atomized it feels. Church and synagogue don't command our attention; apartment-building lobbies are no substitute for the back-yard fence. And so many of us are from somewhere else; we've forfeited the natural network of the extended family. As a result, we're forced to fall back on our own resources. What all these feverish school activities do is remove us from the isolation of the nuclear family. They've created a new arena of social life. "School provides you with an instant club," a journalist with a child at Dalton says. "I was the kind of person who never joined a clique in school. Now I get to be part of this warm, fuzzy group."

I have to admit, there's something comforting about the extracurricular rituals—the outings and conferences and parties. To huddle in the bleachers as an Arctic wind whips across the tundra of Central Park in January, the fathers clutching cups of coffee and muttering into their cell phones, a mom tending the nets as the boys skate up and down the ice in a jostling pack, gives you a bonding high. But I also have a suspicion that something has been lost. Childhood is so regimented now. Pickup baseball games have been replaced by organized after-school sports, with squads of "professional" coaches shepherding the kids to practices and drills. There's the West Side Soccer League, the Cavaliers Athletic Club, the St. Bernard's Tennis Clinic. On Saturday mornings, the kids attend art classes at the Museum of Modern Art or Children's Concerts at Avery Fisher Hall. And they can't just go: you have to sign them up, buy tickets for them, enroll them. It's as if experience itself had become privatized.

I wonder if, in our zeal to shield our kids, we haven't shielded them too well. They're in such a rarefied atmosphere that they don't get what regular life is really like—they don't know kids from the other side of the tracks, or "bad kids" (the ones we called "hoods"), or the pleasures thrown up by unstructured time. A few weeks ago, I picked up my daughter at midnight after a dance at the Mark Hotel, on East Seventy-seventh Street. She had spent the day shopping for a black silk evening bag to go with her outfit. Inside the Mark, a rock band was going full tilt; go-go dancers outfitted in red silk were dancing among the tables, leading a conga line of thirteen-year-olds in Dr. Seuss hats. The party-favor bag dispensed to each guest was stuffed with gold-lamé sunglasses, fancy balloons, a leather CD pouch. What did I do on Saturday night when I was thirteen? I went to the Plant Room in the basement of the Y.M.C.A. and did the Twist while Chubby Checker blasted away on a cheap record-player.

NOSTALGIA can be a distorting emotion. I can't pretend that the family gathered around our dinner table and passing the meat loaf was ideal, or that it was a happy adolescent who loitered in the park at the end of our street unsupervised on summer nights, watching the distant lights of Chicago shimmer on Lake Michigan. But I remember the idleness as dreamlike. I'm haunted by an image in John Updike's "Self-Consciousness," from a passage where he dawdles in the classroom, finishing an illustration for the school's mimeographed (mimeographed!) monthly: "Dusk was gathering in the tall windows that needed a window pole to close, here in this emptied school building, where the overhead lights floated like deflated moons and my cartoon turkey or Santa Claus was building, slow line by line, white cut into soft warm blue." No parents looking over your shoulder, no teachers offering advice—in short, no organized activities. Just a boy sitting by himself at his desk after school, drawing a picture. It's an experience my kids will never know. ♦

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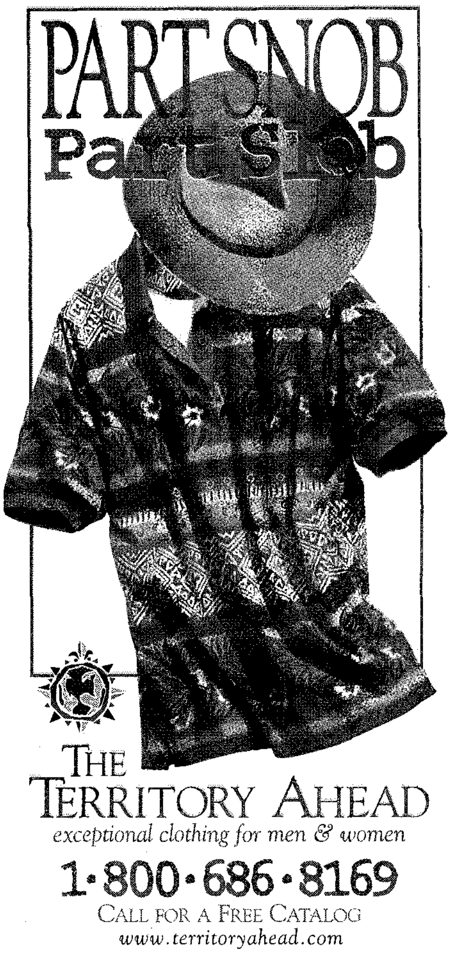

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MR. KURTZ, I PRESUME

Why do most scholars think there was no real Kurtz? Zaire's history is full of them.

BY ADAM HOCHSCHILD

At the beginning of August, 1890, the steamer Roi des Belges—a boxy, wood-burning sternwheeler with a funnel and a pilothouse on its top deck—began a monthlong journey up the Congo River. At the captain's side was a ship's officer, stocky and black-bearded, whose eyes, in photographs, look as if they were perpetually narrowed against the sun. The officer's name was Konrad Korzeniowski; born in Poland, he was newly arrived in the Congo, the colony that Leopold II, King of the Belgians, had just staked out for himself in central Africa. Korzeniowski was learning the river, so his logbook from this voyage is entirely filled with long, businesslike notes about such items as shoals, sandbars, and refuelling points not included on the primitive navigational chart available: "Lulonga Passage. . . . NbyE to NNE. On the Port Side: Snags. Soundings in fathoms: 2, 2, 2, 1, 1, 2, 2, 2, 2. . . ." It would be almost a decade before the aspiring young officer finally got onto paper a great many other features of the Congo not shown on the map, and by that time the world knew him as Joseph Conrad.

After a four-week, thousand-mile trip up the river, the Roi des Belges came back downstream. A month after the voyage ended, Conrad—suffering from malaria and dysentery, and with his view of human nature permanently altered by the brutality and greed he had seen among the white men around him—quit his job and started back to Europe. He had come to the Congo expecting to find the exotic Africa of his childhood dreams; he found instead what he later described as "the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience."

Conrad's journey up and down the river, transformed into fiction, became "Heart of Darkness," which is probably the most widely read short novel in English. Writers and academics have looked at the novel in terms of Freud and Jung and Nietzsche, of Victorian innocence and original sin, of patriarchy and Gnosticism, of postmodernism and post-colonialism and post-structuralism. But, as hundreds of monographs and Ph.D. theses pour out, with titles like "The Eye and the Gaze in 'Heart of Darkness': A Symptomological Reading," it is easy to forget that the novel was closely based on a real place and time. It is also easy to overlook, as almost all of Conrad's many biographers have done, certain real people: several likely models for the novel's central figure, who is one of the twentieth century's most notorious literary villains—Mr. Kurtz.

In the novel, Marlow, who is the narrator and Conrad's alter ego, is hired by an ivory-trading company to sail a steamboat up a tropical river to meet Mr. Kurtz, the company's brilliant, ambitious star agent. Along the way, Marlow hears rumors that Kurtz has gathered enormous quantities of ivory and has also sunk into unspecified savagery. Marlow's steamer, after surviving an attack by Africans, picks up a load of ivory and also Kurtz, who is fatally ill. Kurtz talks of his grandiose plans, then dies as they head downstream. Kurtz is sketched with only a few bold strokes, but he is what endures in Conrad's novel: the lone white man far up the great river, with his dreams of grandeur, his great store of ivory, and his bizarre fiefdom carved out of the jungle.

Something we especially remember is the scene of Marlow on the steamboat looking through his binoculars at what he thinks are ornamental knobs on top of the fence posts near Kurtz's house and finding that each is "black, dried, sunken, with closed eyelids—a head that seemed to sleep at the top of that pole, and with the shrunken dry lips showing a narrow white line of the teeth." Even many people who haven't read the novel remem-

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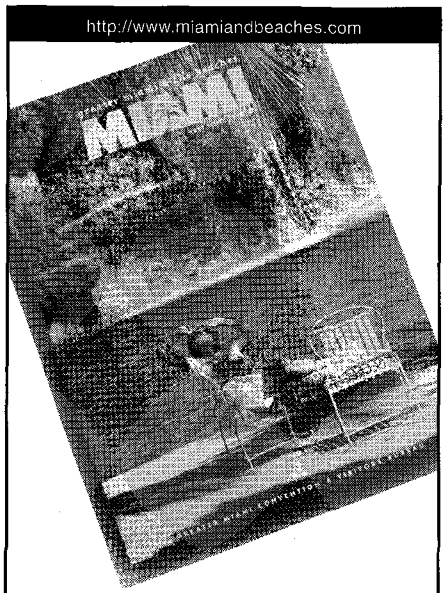

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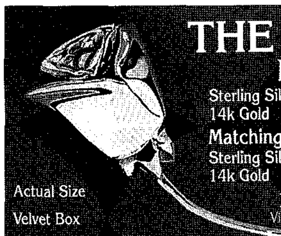

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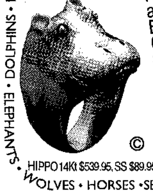

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ber the severed heads, because Francis Ford Coppola included a few when he transferred "Heart of Darkness" to the screen in "Apocalypse Now."

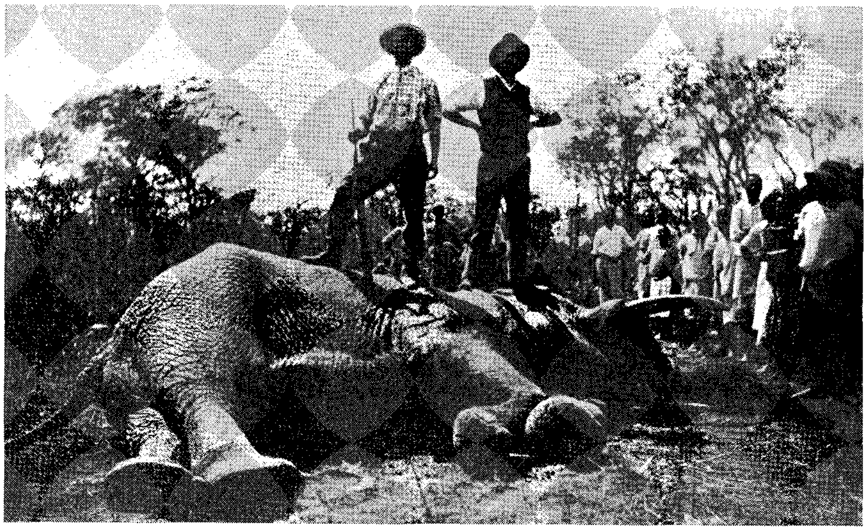
Such images have made Kurtz a cultural touchstone. Just three weeks ago, a front-page story in the *Times* described a brutal leader of Serbian mercenaries in Zaire as being "like a petty tyrant, a modern-day echo of Kurtz in Joseph Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness.' " This contemporary Kurtz, who operated under the name Colonel Yugo, unleashed a reign of terror in the city of Kisangani which included summary executions, the starving of prisoners, and the torturing of people by electric shocks and by grazing their heads with bullets. Kisangani, which was known as Stanley Falls when Conrad's steamboat arrived there, in 1890, is the Inner Station of "Heart of Darkness"—the very place where the original Kurtz spread *his* reign of terror.

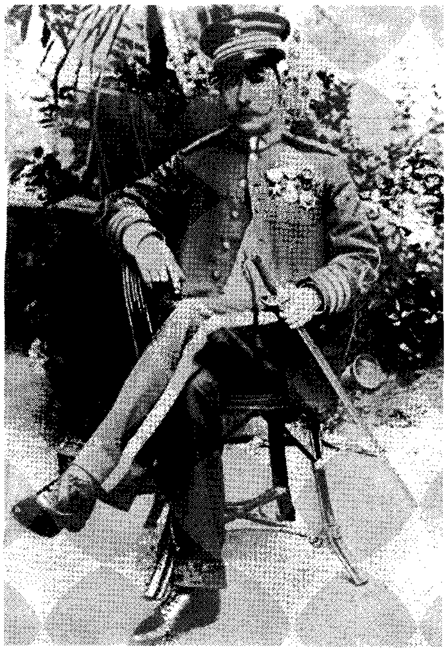
No doubt Conrad drew part of Kurtz from deep inside himself; that is what gives the reader an uneasy empathy with Kurtz's boundless ambition and with his vision of himself as the apostle of civilization among the awed savages. But Conrad also took aspects of Kurtz from various other men whom he encountered during his six months in the Congo or whom he heard about then or afterward.

One prototype who has long been pointed to by Conrad's vast legion of biographers and critics is Georges Antoine Klein, a Frenchman who was an agent for an ivory-collecting company at Stanley Falls, the destination of Conrad's river voyage. The Roi des Belges picked up Klein, who was very sick, and he died on shipboard during the return journey. But apart from that, and the similarity of name, Mr. Klein seems to have had little in common with Mr. Kurtz. Another commonly identified Kurtz prototype is an agent named Arthur Hodister, a Belgian famed for amassing huge supplies of ivory. Hodister eventually muscled in too aggressively on the territory of the regional warlords and ivory traders who were there before the whites arrived. In 1892, two years after Conrad's sojourn in the Congo, Hodister's rivals captured and beheaded him.

When scholars talk about the more bloodthirsty aspects of Kurtz, they often assume that Conrad made these up, or borrowed them from indigenous practices in the region. In "Conrad's Western World," which devotes more than a hundred pages to the sources of "Heart of Darkness" and is thus the most extensive treatment of the subject in print, the critic Norman Sherry writes, "As for the shrunken heads on poles round Kurtz's house, these might be a macabre transference by Conrad of the fate of Hodister and his men."

We know from other witnesses that local warlords along the river at this time did indeed display the severed heads of their victims. But did Conrad have to make a "macabre transference" to imagine Kurtz doing the same? Sherry and others have chosen to ignore several other prototypes who share a feature of Kurtz that the critics prefer to think of as phantasmagoric: they were white men who collected African heads.





Two possible Kurtz prototypes, Léon Rom (above, with rifle) and Guillaume Van Kerckhoven (right, seated), inflicted their reigns of terror a century before the arrival of the Serbian mercenary Colonel Yugo.

RIGHT: COLLECTIONS ROYAL MILITARY MUSEUM, BRUSSELS

THE first of these men was Guillaume Van Kerckhoven, a hot-tempered, swashbuckling adventurer with a wax-tipped mustache and a rakish grin. Van Kerckhoven was an officer in the Force Publique—the army of black troops under white commanders which, at the time Conrad visited the Congo, was busy subduing various rebellions throughout King Leopold's vast colony. On one of those campaigns, Van Kerckhoven and some of his soldiers had even travelled on the Roi des Belges some months before Conrad did. Van Kerckhoven was known for seizing both slaves and ivory during these excursions. On one occasion, he got into a quarrel with Arthur Hodister, and the two men fought a duel; on another, he shot and killed a hundred and twenty-five prisoners of war. One of his expeditions, a former Congo governor-general said, was "a hurricane which passed through the countryside leaving nothing but devastation behind it." A man who had travelled on a river steamboat with Van Kerckhoven in 1887 wrote that the officer "told me during the course of this journey that he used to pay his native soldiers . . . 5 brass rods (2 ½ d.) per human head they

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something pulses with a life that lies outside our language:
for all their varicose veins and dried grain lines,
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to whatever weather swaggers off the Atlantic
or over the holy nose of Croagh Patrick to ruffle
the supple grasses with no backbone (which seem
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tighten their grip on these and hang on, perfecting
their art and craft of saying next to nothing
while the rain keeps coming down, the chapping wind
whittles them, and the merciless sun
just stares and stares; yearly the shore is eaten away
and they'll dangle by a thread until salvaged
and planted again in the open field, which they bring
to an order of sorts, showing us how to be at home
and useful in adversity, and weather it.

—EAMON GRENNAN

brought him during the course of any military operations he conducted. He said it was to stimulate their prowess in the face of the enemy."

Records of much of Conrad's stay in the Congo are scanty, and we do not know if he and Van Kerckhoven ever met. But the traveller who heard Van Kerckhoven's story of collecting heads was Roger Casement, the one good friend Conrad made in Africa. In 1890, at the Congo seaport of Matadi, Conrad and Casement shared a room for some ten days, and they met again after several months. Casement, who later won fame as a human-rights crusader and Irish patriot, is one of the few people Conrad met in Africa, black or white, about whom he ever had a pleasant word to say. "Thinks, speaks well, most intelligent and very sympathetic," Conrad wrote in his diary. Several years later, the two ran into each other at a dinner in London, before Conrad began writing "Heart of Darkness," and, according to Conrad, "went away from there together to the Sports Club and talked till 3 in the morning."

By all accounts, Casement was uncommonly eloquent, and his fund of stories from the years he spent in the Congo clearly influenced Conrad's vision of the territory. "He could tell you things!" the novelist wrote to a friend. "Things I have tried to forget."

WHEN Conrad was writing "Heart of Darkness," he almost certainly had in mind a second white collector of African heads: Léon Rom, a brusque-looking young man with a military bearing. He was another Force Publique officer, and his combat exploits earned him various medals and numerous writeups in the voluminous Belgian colonial-heroic literature of the period.

In 1895, a British explorer and journalist passed through Stanley Falls, where Rom was then commander. The explorer's journal, published in the *Century* magazine, describes a punitive state expedition against a group of Africans who had rebelled against the colonial regime: "Many women and children were taken, and twenty-one heads were brought to the falls, and have been used by Captain Rom as a decoration round a flower-bed in front of his house!" A Belgian writer, Jules Marchal, whose books form the definitive scholarly history of the Congo in this period, has unearthed another detail: at Stanley

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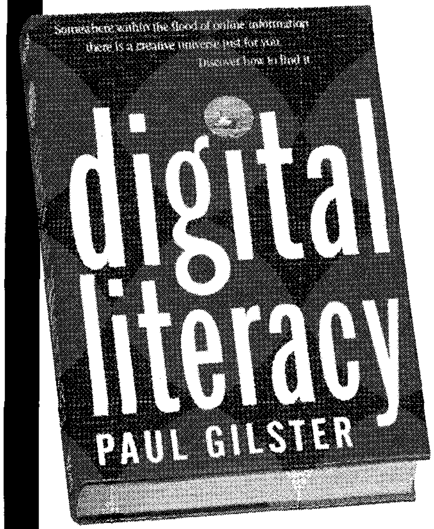

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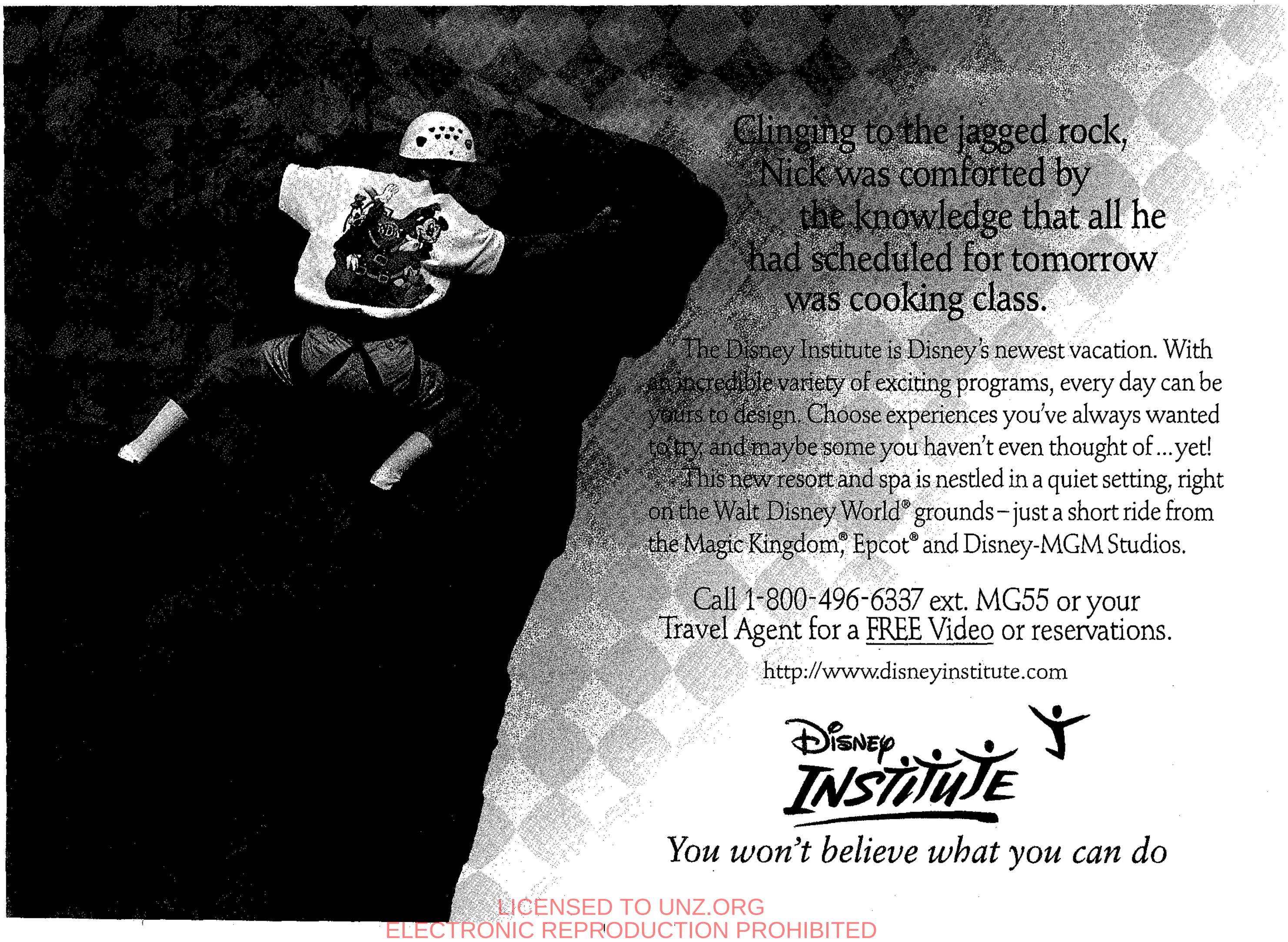
Falls, Rom kept a gallows permanently erected in front of his headquarters.

Stanley Falls, the upstream limit of navigation on the main stretch of the Congo River, is where Marlow's steamboat turns around, and where Marlow sees Kurtz's house and the severed heads of black "rebels." Yet, of six full-scale biographies of Conrad in recent decades, by John Batchelor, Frederick Karl, Roger Tennant, Jeffrey Meyers, Jocelyn Baines, and Zdzislaw Najder, only Batchelor's mentions Rom, and in just one sentence. More alert, the Swedish writer Sven Lindqvist gives Rom several paragraphs in a recent book, in which he points out something important: even if Conrad missed the *Century* article, the London *Saturday Review*, a magazine that he admired and read faithfully, picked up the story of Captain Rom and his twenty-one severed heads in its issue of December 17, 1898. As far as we can tell from Conrad's letters, that was within a few days of when he began writing "Heart of Darkness."

Besides the ghoulish detail of the heads, there was perhaps a special reason that this story could have caught Conrad's eye: in the Congo, Rom and Conrad may have met. This would have happened on August 2, 1890, when Conrad, accompanied by another white man and a caravan of black porters carrying their supplies, finished a monthlong trek inland from the coast to reach the spot where he was to begin his journey up the Congo River. About five miles before reaching the riverside village of Kinshasa, where the Roi des Belges was waiting, he passed through the neighboring post of Leopoldville. All told, only about twenty white men were living in those two places, each of which was just a scattering of thatch-roofed buildings. (In later years, the two posts expanded and merged: the resulting city was known as Leopoldville under the Belgians and is called Kinshasa today.)

On the day that Conrad passed through Leopoldville, the station chief there was Léon Rom. Conrad made no entry in his diary on August 2nd; and Rom's notebook, which in a neat, calligraphic hand records any raid or campaign that could win him another medal, shows no expeditions away from Leopoldville at that time. If he was on hand, he would certainly have greeted any caravan with white newcomers, for such caravans did not arrive every day. And Conrad spoke near-perfect French, so he and Rom would have had a language in common. Rom's collection of twenty-one heads lay in a different place and half a decade in the future, but it is possible that if Conrad read about them in the *Century*, or the *Saturday Review*, he remembered a young officer he had met in Leopoldville.

There are other striking similarities between Rom and Mr. Kurtz which suggest that Conrad had Rom in mind when he created Kurtz. For the most part, these center around the way that both the actual Léon Rom and the fictional Mr. Kurtz carried out their looting of central Africa amid pretensions to high culture. In the novel, Mr. Kurtz is an intellectual, "an emissary of . . . science, and progress." Rom also had scientific ambitions: he brought many butterfly specimens back to Europe and was


Clinging to the jagged rock, Nick was comforted by the knowledge that all he had scheduled for tomorrow was cooking class.

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elected a member of the Entomological Society of Belgium.

Furthermore, Mr. Kurtz is an artist—the painter of "a small sketch in oils" of a woman carrying a torch, which hangs on a wall at the Central Station, as Leopoldville / Kinshasa is called in the novel. Léon Rom, when he was not collecting butterflies or human heads, painted portraits and landscapes; five of his paintings can be found in a Brussels museum today.

Mr. Kurtz is also a journalist and a writer. He writes, among other things, a seventeen-page report—"vibrating with eloquence . . . a beautiful piece of writing"—to the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs. (It is at the end of this report that he scrawls in an unsteady hand his famous line "Exterminate all the brutes!") In 1899, the same year in which "Heart of Darkness" appeared as a magazine serial, Léon Rom fulfilled his own literary ambitions. After returning to Belgium, he, too, published a report on savage customs.

Rom's "Le Nègre du Congo" is an odd little book—jaunty, arrogant, and sweepingly superficial. The main text is only seventy-three pages; another nine pages of appendixes describe ports of call en route from Belgium to the Congo. There were several hundred ethnic groups in the Congo, and trying to describe them all in this space is like writing seventy-three pages on "The White People of Europe." Short chapters cover "Le Nègre en Général," the black woman, food, pets, native medicine, and other subjects. Rom was an enthusiastic hunter—a photograph in a Congo veterans' magazine shows him jubilantly posed on the body of a dead elephant—and his chapter on hunting is as long as those on Congolese religious beliefs, death rituals, and chief-succession practices combined.

The voice we hear in Rom's book is the voice in which we might imagine Mr. Kurtz to be writing about savage customs that need to be suppressed. Of *la race noire*, Rom says, "The product of a mindless state, its feelings are coarse, its passions rough, its instincts brutish, and, in addition, it is proud and vain. The black man's principal occupation, and that to which he dedicates the greatest part of his existence, consists of stretching out on a mat in the warm rays of the sun, like a crocodile on the sand. . . . The black man has no idea of time, and, questioned on that subject by a European, he generally responds with something stupid."

After much more in this vein, Rom gives a lengthy, patronizing description of the black porters who carried supplies for the Congo's white conquerors. As a caravan sets off each morning, the porters bustle noisily about, each one eagerly wanting "to succeed in finding a place in line of his choice, for example beside a friend with whom he can trade dreams of the previous night or elaborate the menu, more or less varied and delicious, of the meal they will have at the next stop."

These conscripted porters not only were often chained together but were notoriously ill treated. Conrad himself saw the bodies of dead porters by the roadside as he journeyed from the coast, and recorded the sight both in his diary and in "Heart of Darkness," describing in the latter Marlow's coming upon "now and then a carrier dead in harness, at rest in the long grass near the path, with an empty water-gourd and his long staff lying by his side."

There is yet another interesting parallel between Léon Rom and Mr. Kurtz. Mr. Kurtz succeeds in "getting himself adored" by the Africans of the Inner Station: chiefs crawl on the ground before him; the blacks obey him with slavish devotion; and a beautiful woman among them appears to be his concubine. In 1895, a disapproving Belgian in the Force Publique confided to his diary a strikingly similar situation involving a fellow-officer:

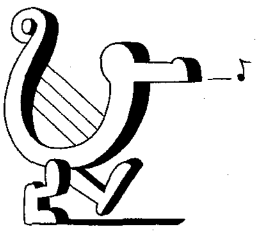
> He makes his agents starve while he gives provisions in abundance to the black women of his harem (for he wants to act like a great Arab chief), vulgar, dirty negresses. Finally, he got into his dress uniform at his house, brought together his women, picked up some piece of paper and pretended to read to them that the king had named him the big chief and that the other whites of the station were only small fry. . . . He gave 50 lashes to a poor little negress because she wouldn't be his mistress, then he *gave* her to a soldier.

What is most significant here is how the diarist introduces his account of the officer: "This man wants to play the role of a second Rom."

That Conrad read at least one of the magazine accounts of Léon Rom and his twenty-one human heads is highly likely, but the other points of resemblance between Rom and Mr. Kurtz tantalizingly suggest a closer connection.

Rom and Van Kerckhoven were not the only white officers in the Congo who collected African heads. Others are on record as doing so as well, and the most notorious of them all was a man named Léon Fiévez, who was a Force Publique officer from 1888 to 1899. Half a century later, speaking to a Belgian priest gathering oral histories in the Congo, a villager named Ngombo recalled a punitive expedition that Fiévez ordered against a group of Africans who had killed one of Fiévez's soldiers: "The massacre was total. They"—Fiévez's troops—"cut off the heads and packed them in baskets. We stayed in the village with our mothers; they held us tight to keep us from playing. The whole village was plunged into complete silence." The next day, the soldiers "unpacked the heads . . . and brought them to Ntange"—the Africans' name for Fiévez. "He said, 'Good! They killed the soldier. Now they're dead, too.' "

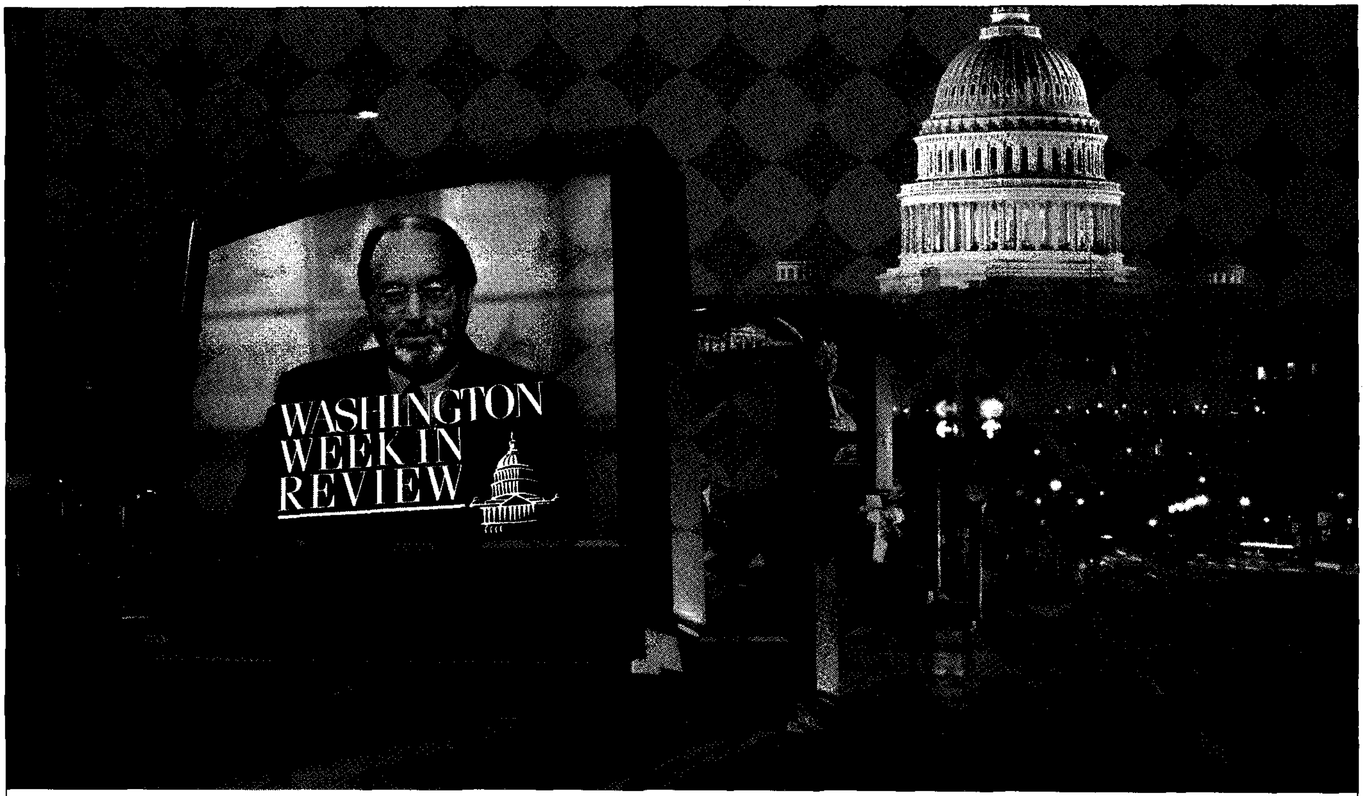
This picture of Fiévez tallies with one from a white government agent who passed through Fiévez's post in 1894. In his diary this man quotes Fiévez's description of what he did when Africans failed to supply his troops with manioc: "I made war against them. One example was enough: a hundred heads cut off, and there have been plenty of supplies at the station ever since. My goal is ultimately humanitarian. I killed a hundred people, but that allowed five hundred others to live."



"Humanitarian" acts of this sort in Fiévez's district were widely denounced in the British press in the mid-eighteen-nineties. We do not know whether Conrad read any of these articles, which appeared before he began working on "Heart of Darkness." However, he probably met Fiévez in 1890. At the time, Fiévez had just taken command of a strategic, heavily fortified post called Basoko, where the Roi des Belges may have stopped to refuel, and possibly spend the night, on its way both up and down the Congo River.

What—if anything, spoken or unspoken—passed between Fiévez and Conrad, or between Léon Rom and Conrad, we will never know. What matters is that, whatever rich layers of additional meaning we can legitimately glean from it, "Heart of Darkness" is also very much an account of a time and a place that was filled with men like Léon Rom and Guillaume Van Kerckhoven and Léon Fiévez. The critics have forgotten what Conrad himself wrote, in a 1917 preface: " 'Heart of Darkness' is experience . . . pushed a little (and only very little) beyond the actual facts of the case."

The facts of the case are that the Congo that Conrad saw in 1890 was in the midst of a human catastrophe—the bloodiest chapter of Europe's turn-of-the-century scramble for Africa. The Europeans who came to exploit the territory and subdue its peoples tended to be hard-bitten men who were willing to risk death (tropical diseases killed about



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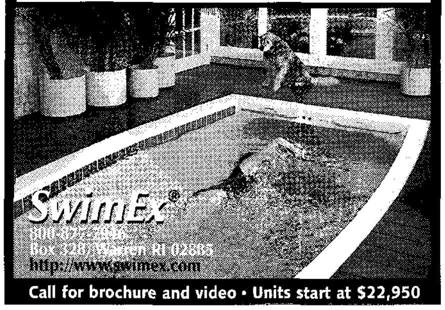

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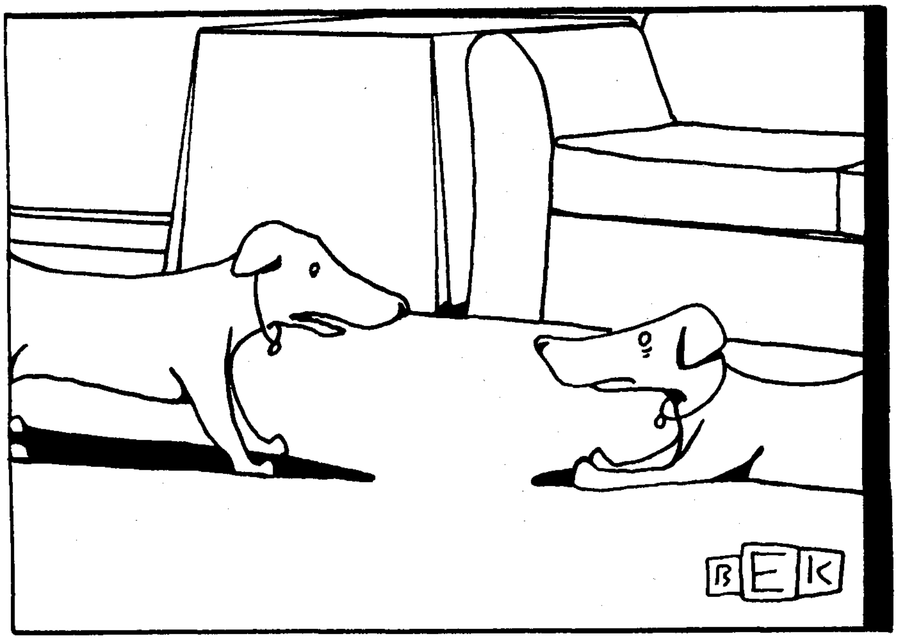
a third of the whites who set foot in the Congo in this period) in order to get rich quick and to enjoy some combat against a poorly armed foe as well. White contempt for Africans was so great that one British adventurer in the Congo in 1887 packed an African's head in a box of salt and sent it to his Piccadilly taxidermist to be stuffed and mounted—yet another severed-head story that Conrad may have heard, incidentally. Jan Vansina, professor emeritus of history and anthropology at the University of Wisconsin, one of the world's leading ethnographers of central Africa, estimates that between 1880 and 1920 the territory that was then the Congo and is now Zaire suffered a net loss of some ten million people, fully one-half of its population.

The death toll grew as African rebels were killed by the Force Publique, under officers like Rom and Van Kerckhoven, and as soldiers razed or burned villages to frighten surrounding communities into submission. Many more Africans were simply worked to death. A still larger number died because they fled this Draconian regime for swamps and wilderness where there was little food or shelter. And the largest number were killed by various diseases that attacked a traumatized and malnourished population—something that later happened in the Nazi and Soviet forced-labor camps.

Europeans and Americans have long been reluctant to regard the conquest of Africa as having been on the same genocidal scale as the deeds of Hitler and Stalin. For this reason, we find it more comfortable to think of Kurtz's head-collecting as a "macabre transference" and to locate the sources of his murderousness in Conrad's imagination. We have eagerly pulled "Heart of Darkness" loose from its historical moorings and turned it into a universal parable. The most macabre transference of all is our insistence on moving the novel out of Africa. The first time it was filmed, by the Spanish filmmaker Manuel Aragon, it was transplanted to Spain after the Civil War. Coppola moved the story to Vietnam. Only the third time, in a little-noticed 1994 cable-TV movie, was the story set in Africa. Would we not think it strangely evasive if a director filmed Solzhenitsyn's "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich" but didn't set it in the Soviet Union, or filmed Elie Wiesel's "Night" but didn't set it in Auschwitz?

In the Congo, the equivalents of the Soviet and Nazi prison camps were the stations along the great river network, from which soldiers, porters, and laborers were dispatched to suppress uprisings, confiscate food, and gather ivory or rubber. For the officials who ran this lucrative slave-labor economy, there was a detailed, highly revealing instruction book. The "Manuel du Voyageur et du Résident au Congo," as it was called, went through several editions, beginning in the late eighteen-nineties. The territory's administrators bought a copy for each agent and for each government



"I find that incessant barking eases the pain."

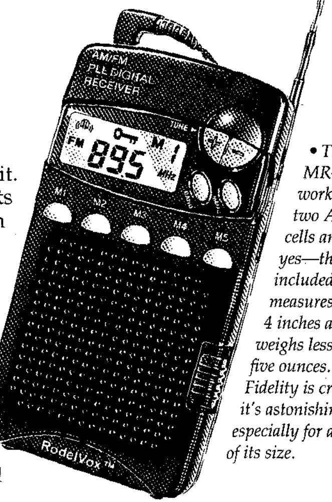
post. The manual, which runs to five volumes, covers everything from river navigation to the proper firing of artillery salutes. In its advice to military officers, it lists the punishments available for use against disobedient black soldiers and laborers: "a) Temporary arrest, with or without means of constraint; b) Cessation of pay for one day to six months; c) Irons or the chain, with hard labor, for eight days to six months; d) Whipping, from 12 to 100 strokes." A hundred strokes of a short-handled whip called the *chicotte*, which was made of hippopotamus hide sun-dried into a thick corkscrew shape with razor-sharp edges, were often fatal.

Among other things, the manual justifies the forced labor that was common in most of colonized Africa at this time: "Isn't everyone in Holland forced to work on the dikes when flooding threatens? . . . If one admits that Europeans can, for the sake of the common good, take charge by the authority of their foresight and hard work, should you regard as sacred . . . the apathy of Africans?" The best way to overcome this "apathy," the manual suggests, is to take hostages. That was the method by which hundreds of recalcitrant Congo villages were terrorized into supplying food or labor or rubber. Women and children were rounded up and held until male villagers did the whites' bidding. The manual tells the aspiring agent how to proceed:

> Taking prisoners is, in Africa . . . an easy thing to do, for if the natives hide they will not go far from their village and must come to look for food in the gardens which surround it. In watching these carefully, you will be certain of capturing people after a brief delay. If you have the patience to prevent the blacks from resupplying themselves for several days, and to wait until hunger forces them to show themselves, they themselves will come asking for food. . . . When you feel you have enough captives, you should choose among them an old person, preferably an old woman. . . . Send her to her chief to begin negotiations.

Many hostages starved during their imprisonment; the "negotiations" were about how much food or labor or rubber the village would have to supply before the surviving hostages were released.

The "Manuel du Voyageur" was produced by an editorial committee of several dozen people. One of its members, who began working at this job some two years before Conrad sat down to write "Heart of Darkness," was Léon Rom. ♦



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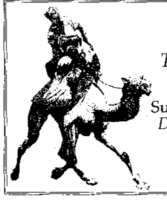

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A REPORTER AT LARGE

AMERICAN GUANXI

It's a new kind of political operating, and it's what propelled the strange odyssey of Nora and Eugene Lum, who somehow managed to make a lot of money for the Democrats—and for themselves.

BY PETER J. BOYER

TEN days after Bill Clinton won his second term, he boarded Air Force One with his wife and set off for Hawaii, in pursuit of a corollary goal, which was to play more golf than any other President. Waiting for Clinton in Honolulu was former Governor John Waihee, an old friend and golfing partner. The golf promised to be spectacular. An advance team had secured the course at the Luana Hills Country Club, a challenging layout cut into a valley beneath an ancient volcano on Oahu's windward side, in a landscape of royal palms and tropical flowers. But the President's party met with bad luck: it rained. The weather was not merely wet but ruinously so—a deluge of such volume and ferocity and duration that the streams overflowed their beds, and the lovely grounds of Luana Hills became a swamp. Though Clinton and Waihee pressed on ("Aqua-golf," one person in the entourage termed it), it seemed as if the site had been cursed. It had been.

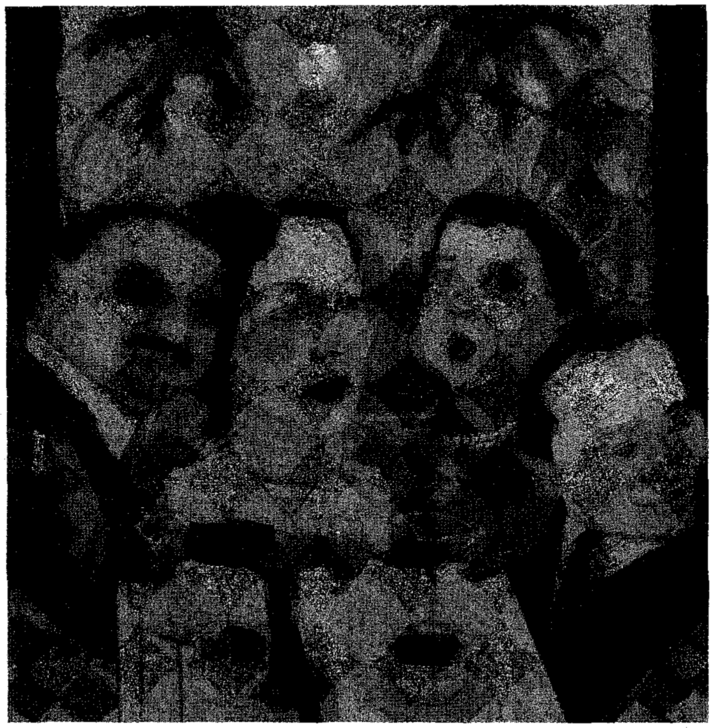
The Maunawili Valley, before the golf course was carved into it, was a place of environmental and historical importance: the site of ancient Hawaiian habitats and, more recently, the summer residence of Queen Liliuokalani, the last Hawaiian monarch, who was inspired there to write the Hawaiian anthem, "Aloha 'Oe." The valley was home to a small community of farmers and ranchers when word got out, in 1985, that an Osaka-based pachinko-parlor baron had bought a thousand acres from the farmers' landlord and planned to build two golf courses there. The residents who would be displaced protested; they won a few battles but lost the war, and were removed. It was not an easy parting. Homes, and even a chapel, were razed, and the community vanished, its residents scattered through the islands and beyond. One of them, an old woman named Jennie Olinger, had kept a banana patch for sixty years. As she was leaving that property, she paused and placed a curse on the golf-course development and those associated with it.

Very early in the struggle over the land, a local consultant hired by the pachinko-parlor baron to help overcome the political barriers facing the development had announced to one of the ranchers that his cattle were to be transported off his property, for "safekeeping." One day shortly afterward, the consultant directed a roundup, carried out by a posse of armed horsemen, which resulted in the slaughter of the rancher's prized stud bull. The consultant said that the bull had charged the horsemen, and that the killing had been an act of self-defense. But at least one witness reported that the riders had come with carving knives and butchering platters, and it was later said that the bull was carved into steaks and distributed to the horsemen, and that the other cattle were sold, with the proceeds going to the consultant.

The consultant was an attorney named Eugene Lum. He and his wife, Nora, were a pair of local business people and political fixers. The Lums believed firmly in the persuasive power of political donations. In the case of the Maunawili Valley development, however, political donations were a problem, because the money from the pachinko-parlor baron—Gene Lum's client—came from a foreign source, and was therefore illegal. In 1994, his donations to Hawaiian politicians, which exceeded sixty thousand dollars, became the focus of what was then the largest civil penalty in the history of the Federal Election Commission; the F.E.C. ordered the politicians to return hundreds of thousands of dollars donated by foreign contributors. Among those cited for having accepted these donations was Waihee, who had received thirteen thousand dollars from the developer. He had also met with the Lums to discuss an issue connected to the proposed golf course in Maunawili.

By 1992, the F.B.I. was deep into an investigation of political corruption in Hawaii, and its inquiry included the Lums. But they were no longer in Hawaii; they had moved to California, had joined forces with Ron Brown, the chairman of the Democratic National Committee, and had set themselves up as fund-raisers for Bill Clinton and Al Gore.

WHEN Gene and Nora Lum entered the national fund-raising game, in 1992, they stepped into the grand casino of American politics, where, with boldness and luck, even small-time players could hit it big. The Lums were both bold and lucky. Within three years, Nora Lum was attending a state dinner at the White House and meeting with members of the President's Cabinet on trade policy. The Lums' ascent grew out of a moment when the ever-present money lust of national politics met the rising political importance of Asian-Americans. Gene is an ethnic Chinese, and Nora is of Japanese descent. The intersection was fund-raising, and the ruling notion was *guanxi*, a Mandarin word meaning "connections." In China, and in the China sphere, *guanxi* is the basis of daily commerce, large and small. "If you do business in China, the *guanxi* is a must," Tony Chen, the State of California's trade representative in Hong Kong, says. "It is the foundation of basic trust. It means that you are somewhat more than just a friend—you are a *close* friend, a relative, a schoolmate.” American politicians came up with a bastardized translation: “Give money, and you’re connected.” Referring to the Asian names in the current fund-raising headlines, Chen observes, “A lot of these people were nobody ten years ago; today they may have a coffee with the Clintons in the White House. You have money, you donate money, people listen to you. Where is the *guanxi*? They play it the American way.”



Ron Brown, Nora Lum, Melinda Yee, and John Huang. Questions about APAC *may never be resolved: the Lums have no records.*

NATALIE ASCENCIOS

Among the most accomplished practitioners of American *guanxi* is John Huang, a Chinese-born American citizen who parlayed fund-raising skills into a Commerce Department job and was then able to sit in the Oval Office and negotiate his transfer to the Democratic National Committee, all the while keeping a top-secret security clearance. That clearance offered another opportunity for *guanxi:* Huang had ties to the Lippo Group, a multinational banking conglomerate that is based in Indonesia and has many joint partnerships with the Chinese government. To give Huang his due, his connections were at least real. American *guanxi* often lends itself to exploitation by hustlers whose donations buy photo ops that can be used to imply or exaggerate connections. It was against this possibility that the National Security Council tried to warn the White House in 1995 to steer clear of the California entrepreneur Johnny Chung, who, nevertheless, ushered a Chinese arms dealer into the White House for a photo op with the President and then handed fifty thousand dollars to Hillary Clinton’s chief of staff.

Gene and Nora Lum, who are in their fifties, were early masters of the art of American *guanxi*, and Hawaii served as a suitable training ground for ambitious enterprises. In their business dealings, which included real-estate investments, providing political advice to developers, and (in Nora’s case) selling clothing in a Waikiki tourist shop, the Lums’ chief asset was Nora’s ability to make a great impression. Years after meeting her, even people who parted unhappily from the Lums remember Nora’s exquisite dress, regal bearing, and compelling charm. She was unquestionably the animating force of the family enterprise. Nora doesn’t drive, and acquaintances have often joked that Gene’s role is to serve as her chauffeur. (In a deposition in response to a lawsuit a few years ago, she said of her husband, “He has basically been retired and he spends most of his time playing golf.”) And there were always gifts. Nora seldom made an important new acquaintance without bestowing presents—packages of macadamia nuts and Kona coffee, along with Hawaiian shirts and toys for the kids. “I thought they were Hawaiian royalty” is how one former associate describes the Lums. Although their fortunes rose and fell, they always managed to convey an air of importance and prosperity. A Democrat with ties to the White House, in discussing the couple recently, said, “I thought they owned half of Honolulu. . . . You mean that’s bullshit?” The fact is that the Lum “estate” in Hawaii is a modest house in an ordinary residential neighborhood; in one of the Lums’ numerous legal disputes—this one over Nora’s failure to repay a loan—she declared herself “judgment proof,” because she had no attachable cash or assets.

But what they lacked in attachable resources the Lums easily made up for in ambition. Nora had specialized in chemistry at the University of Hawaii, and graduated in 1964. Gene had majored in American and Asian history and government at the university, and had received a law degree from the University of California in 1964. In Hawaii, Gene ran for state office three times, as a Republican, but failed each time. Eventually, he and Nora became Democrats and moved behind the scenes. Gene landed a staff job on the Honolulu city council, while Nora made her way in the business world, advising clients on property investments and later making investments herself. Gene joined the staff of the councilman whose committee decided zoning changes for major developments; at the same time, he acted as a consultant to developers.

Hawaii has been run by the same Democratic political machine since it became a state, in 1959. As in other small, one-party states—Arkansas in Bill Clinton’s time, for instance, or, until recently, Oklahoma—politics and business converge in a way that invariably seems to benefit insiders and frustrate those without connections. The value of being wired became acutely felt in the nineteen-eighties, with the decline of the dollar and the rapid influx of Japanese money to the islands. “Suddenly, one of the most beautiful places on earth became a bargain place,” says Anthony Locricchio, a public-interest lawyer, who fought some of the new developments. “It was for sale, it was cheap, and you found willing collaborators.”

In particular, Nora Lum focussed on making political connections, and was apparently skilled at spinning even the most tenuous link into the appearance of a bonded friendship. When Waihee was governor, Nora is said to have made business calls on her cell phone from the public waiting room outside the Governor's office, mentioning her whereabouts in a portentous whisper. Tony Gil, an attorney who represents a local union official, says that Nora befriended his client only for his political connections. “She was trying to climb into established political relationships and act as though she had a great deal of influence,” Gil says.

The money pouring into Hawaii created a golden opportunity for professional facilitators like the Lums, as political expression increasingly took the form of fund-raising and campaign contributions. “The influence over the governor's office, over all the major political entities in Hawaii, was monumental,” Locricchio recalls. “Huge amounts of political contributions came in, defying the federal law that foreign money can't be used in federal, state, or local elections.” Someone familiar with the Maunawili golf-course deal recalls that Gene Lum was one of several people encouraging the foreign developer to make donations to various politicians, and that Lum picked some of the politicians himself.

In the late eighties, another developer, Charles Chidiac, learned just how disastrous it could be not to have connections in Hawaii. Chidiac, a Lebanese investor who had married a Hawaiian and become an American citizen, dreamed of building the state's most fabulous golf resort, which he would call the Hawaiian Riviera. In 1987, he arranged financing for it, and, after buying twenty thousand acres of seashore property on the Big Island, set out to begin construction. Although he hired three law firms and a select group of consultants, the project was held up by the state's Land Use Commission. Chidiac was told that the best way for him to handle the commission was to hire another set of consultants and lawyers, and then yet another, but still his project remained stalled. Then, Chidiac says, someone in his office told him about a woman who specialized in fixing political problems, and introduced Chidiac to Nora Lum.

Chidiac says that he paid Nora a fifty-thousand-dollar fee in 1989, gave her a hundred-and-twenty-seven-thousand-dollar personal loan (which was not repaid until 1993), and made other payments. Some of his problems vanished; for instance, a fish-smoking plant that he owned had been regularly hassled by local health authorities, and suddenly the hassling stopped. (Nora, through her lawyer, denies any involvement with the plant, and says that the fifty-thousand-dollar fee was not for work on the resort, and was, at Chidiac's request, passed along to someone else.) In any case, after two and a half years, during which Chidiac was paying interest of a hundred and fifty thousand dollars a month on his resort loan, the project was still stuck. Finally, Chidiac says, he was told that he would have to “pay his dues,” and now the price would be higher. What about Nora's help? “At the last minute,” he says, “she came to me and she said, ‘Listen, you're going to get a call and you have to pay. You have to pay your dues. I just couldn't do anything for you.’ ” He believes that “she cheated me.”

THE MILLER'S DAUGHTER

Flour dust whitening his hair,
the miller, father of eight,
holds out for my polite approval
Hope No. 9, a stunned girl.

Her eyes! Set an inch more wide
apart even than his. It's as if
evolution had aimed us as far
ahead as it dared, then flinched.

Already she gazes at my face
with her head cocked a little to one side.
A few more degrees of separation
and seeing itself might split in half

neatly, the way the bobbing cows
find the muddy path home, barbed wire
on one hand, open meadow on the other—
white, with black clouds sailing across their ribs—

or else like the birds, so nervous
they can only take small bites.
Is what they see one wraparound menace
or two onrushing fears?

To face life head on: brave intent
of stoics and stonemasons,
while what's ahead comes blindside, truth
glimpsed out of the corner of one eye.

—PAUL JENKINS

Chidiac himself is no innocent: in 1991, he was named as an unindicted co-conspirator in the B.N.L. international-banking scandal, and an I.R.S. investigation into his activities has reached a federal grand jury. Much of what he says is flatly disputed by the Lums. But it is indisputable that Chidiac had business dealings with the Lums, and that he made payments and loans to Nora. In 1991, frustrated by his Hawaiian problems, he volunteered to be a coöperating witness for the F.B.I.'s political-corruption investigation. Undercover agents posing as financial backers of proposed resorts began to meet with people in Chidiac's network, including Nora Lum.

The Lums, meanwhile, continued to plan new enterprises, becoming partners in another proposed golf course on the Big Island. As in Maunawili Valley, there was much local opposition to the development, and many obstacles to overcome. The Lums responded characteristically. They built a connection to the island's mayor, who controlled the local zoning board, raising twenty-one thousand dollars in donations and causing yet another controversy.

But the Lums were ready to leave Hawaii and its controversies behind. At the end of 1991, they met Ron Brown, and dined with him at a Honolulu restaurant called Matteo's. Brown was on his way back from a trip to Asia, and Nora, as always, made a memorable first impression: she handed over twenty-six thousand dollars in checks from herself and various businesses to the Democratic National Committee, of which Brown was then chairman. And after this meeting the Lums agreed to move to California to raise money and help get out the vote for Clinton and Gore in the 1992 Presidential campaign.

Within a decade, the Lums had transformed themselves from small-time operators into active participants in national politics. At a 1993 Inaugural gala, they sat at a table with Brown and South Africa's President Nelson Mandela. But they have also attracted the attention of a federal independent counsel (and the I.R.S.), and of at least one congressional committee, which is looking into their 1992 fund-raising activities, to determine, among other things, whether they are connected with the financial troubles now afflicting the White House. Thus far, none of the investigations, including the earlier F.B.I. investigation in Hawaii, have produced an indictment or evidence of lawbreaking. The Lums' maneuvering at the interstices of business and politics has been attended by so many inexplicable controversies that, for now, at least, the Lums may have to be viewed simply as magicians: they have succeeded in enriching themselves and the Democratic Party, and it is not quite apparent how they did it. And the Lums certainly aren't eager to explain their activities. Over the last several months, they turned down repeated requests to be interviewed for this account, and they have been reluctant to talk with journalists in general.

In 1994, while being deposed in a civil suit in Hawaii, Nora Lum testified that she had a "memory disorder." She was asked specifically about a company that she had been involved with:

> Q: How long did you have that company?
> A: I don't recall.
> Q: More than a year?
> A: I really don't recall. It's just blank, those years are blank in my mind.
> Q: When you say those years, which years are you referring to?
> A: I don't know, just certain years it's just blank in my mind.
> Q: Is that more than five years ago?
> A: I don't know.
> Q: Those years that are blank in your mind, do they tend to be specific years that you can't remember?
> A: No, it's like I can't even remember having my second baby, that's just blank. You know, I know she exists, but I can't remember. So I cannot tell you what I don't remember.
> Q: Do you remember a year ago?
> A: Depends what.

THE common explanation for the Democrats' current fund-raising embarrassments is that the Party, spooked by the rise of Newt Gingrich and his Republican revolution in 1994, became incautious in its zeal to keep up with Republican fund-raising for the 1996 campaign. But the Democrats' Asia pipeline was in place long before that, and some of the sources of the suspect money now being returned had actively supported the Clinton-Gore campaign in 1992. John Huang (who raised the bulk of the tainted money), Johnny Chung, and Yah Lin (Charlie) Trie (who gave six hundred and forty thousand dollars to the Clintons' legal-defense fund during a period when the Chinese government was wiring him hundreds of thousands of dollars) did not suddenly arrive in response to the Gingrich menace. The money scandals are an unpleasant aspect of a larger and in many ways positive phenomenon—a growing commonality and geopolitical interdependence between Asian interests and American interests.

In 1960, the city of Los Angeles had an Asian-American population of a hundred thousand, composed mainly of American-born people of Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino descent and including about twenty-five hundred Koreans. Now the city has an Asian-American population of well over a million, a thriving Koreatown, and a metropolitan-area Korean population of about three hundred and fifty thousand. The growth stems from the Immigration Act of 1965, which reversed a long-standing policy that had effectively discouraged Asian immigration. Today, Asian-Americans make up about ten per cent of California's population—more than three million people—and about four per cent of the national population.

The new Asian-Americans changed the profile of their community. Earlier immigrants had severed themselves from their homelands, but the new wave, arriving in the era of high-tech communications, stayed in touch. In 1981, for the first time in America's history, trade over the Pacific exceeded trade over the Atlantic.

Earlier Asian-Americans tended to be conservative, business-oriented, and Republican, and most of them were quiet observers of the political fray beyond the voting booth. But the new community came of age just as the trend toward identity politics flowered, and that trend motivated Asian-Americans to engage the political system on issues—especially proposed changes in immigration policy. These developments did not go unnoticed by the political class, and, predictably, California politicians were the first to recognize an opportunity. Few did more to shape the developing constituency and turn it toward the Democrats than a wily and powerful San Francisco pol named Leo McCarthy. McCarthy was Speaker of the California Assembly from 1974 to 1980, and, as lieutenant governor from 1982 to 1984, he headed trade development—for a state whose exports were already sixty billion dollars. Much of that trade was with Asia.

Through trade missions, McCarthy met John Huang, a rising young executive in the Lippo Group's banking empire. Huang, along with an immigration counsellor named Maria Hsia, was part of a small corps of Asian-American community leaders who in 1988 formed the Pacific Leadership Council, in order to raise their political profile. McCarthy tutored the group in the subtleties of American politics. "I strongly encouraged its members to be involved in direct action," McCarthy says. "I said, 'Go lobby members of the Senate, members of the House, and, just from the heart, explain your point of view in very practical terms.' I also told them about the reality of today's political world—that if you've helped with campaigns, that will help you. . . . They began to understand that if they got active in campaigns, whether as volunteers or by giving money, they could increase their access level." Those whom the politician had helped, McCarthy instructed, might "in return want to help the politician—in this case, Leo McCarthy." And, indeed, Huang and Hsia—along with the communities they represented—did help Leo McCarthy. When he ran for the Senate, in 1988, they went to Washington and were introduced to the national Party. To Democrats, it was like a heavenly gift—a constituency with money.

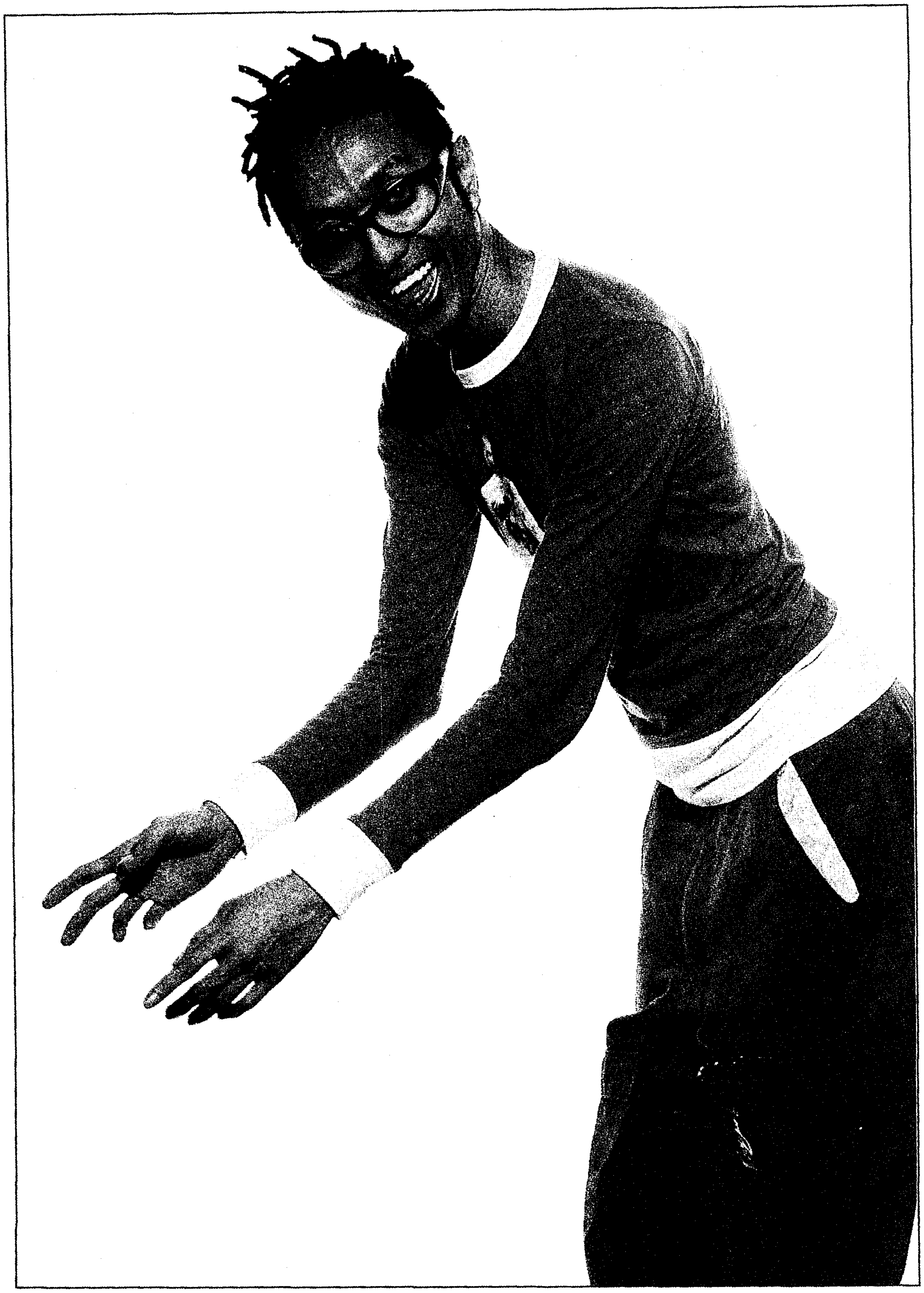
Beginning with the 1988 campaign, Huang, Hsia, and others began to donate to the Democratic Senate Campaign Committee. In return, they got a hearing on their issues—specifically, immigration law—and also recognition as a political force. What seemed most important to them, according to one senior Democratic fund-raiser, was getting "face time" with senators. On this matter the group was most insistent. In 1989, for instance, Huang and Hsia were going on a trip to Taiwan, which would be paid for by the Taiwan-based Fo Kwang Shan Buddhist group. McCarthy, who had lost his Senate race, was also going along, and Huang and Hsia requested that an important senator make the trip as well. Wanting to please them, the Democrats asked Al Gore to go, and he did—thus establishing a *guanxi* he surely regrets. Last April, the Fo Kwang Shan group offered its Los Angeles temple as the site for a D.N.C. fund-raiser organized by Hsia and Huang. The event was attended by Gore, and, of course, became a major embarrassment to him. Accepting thousands of dollars from nuns and monks sworn to poverty was hardly a desirable campaign story, and Gore made things worse by saying at first that he had had no idea the event was a fund-raiser and later admitting that he knew it was "finance-related." Today, the temple finds itself answering grand-jury subpoenas.

The Asian-American involvement in national politics intensified just when the money chase was reaching a frenzy, and when a man whose nickname was Silk took command of the D.N.C. Silk was Ron Brown—an establishment insider with an insurgent's instinct for opportunity, a creature of privilege who also knew how to play race. Brown, who died in a plane crash in Croatia last year, was a man of great drive and enormous magnetism whose personal life—he was an admirer of women—tended toward the freewheeling. As a lobbyist at the high-end Washington firm of Patton, Boggs & Blow, he was unafraid to go wherever the work took him—at one time, he represented the government of Jean-Claude (Baby Doc) Duvalier. He always emerged with his reputation unscathed, and often enhanced—hence the nickname.

During the 1988 campaign of Michael Dukakis, the Democratic National Committee had imposed a fairly strict system of checking on the sources of big contributions—a two-level procedure, in which a donor was subject to a computer check and then approved by a senior fund-raiser. But Dukakis was a loser. When Brown entered the picture, in 1989, he concentrated on bringing new money and new people to the Party, and not on keeping them out, and the second level of scrutiny was abandoned. As a member of a minority

TIDAL RAVE

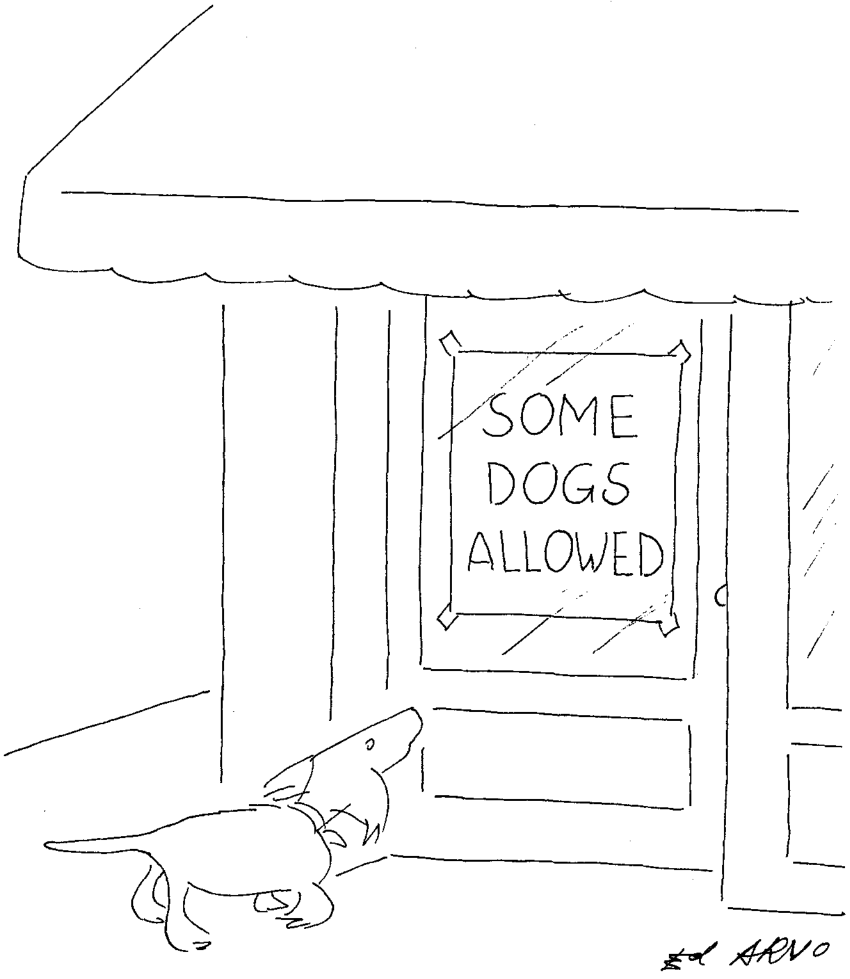
The annual Love Parade is actually a rave, which began in Berlin in 1989, with a hundred and fifty people dancing around a VW bus. Last year, seven hundred thousand showed up (at that rate, everyone on earth will be there in 2006), including the photographer Alfred Steffen, who spent thirty-six hours straight taking portraits in a roadside studio. The German publisher Taschen has collected these documents of youthful self-presentation into "Portrait of a Generation: The Love Parade Family Book," which seems equal parts August Sander and United Colors of Benetton. Ravers such as Ali Nasip, at the right, a techno entrepreneur from Singapore, are identified by name and brief quotations ("I made the plastic dirndl for the parade," or "At the Love Parade, I can finally be myself—wear my see-through top and whatever") that bring the event's ecstasy and innocence into sharp focus.



himself, Brown welcomed the new Asian-American campaigners. He hired a twenty-six-year-old named Melinda Yee, a former director of the nationwide Organization of Chinese Americans, and gave her the full-time job of energizing the community.

Connections being everything, Nora and Eugene Lum had been networking with the Brown family for several years before they actually met Brown himself. They had been introduced to Brown's son, Michael, at a California political event in 1988, when he was in his early twenties, and as the relationship developed they described him to people as the son they'd never had. Their meeting with Ron Brown, three years later, couldn't have come at a more opportune time. The 1992 campaign demanded a great deal of organizing and fund-raising—particularly in California, since it was both the largest electoral state and the capital of Asian America. After meeting with the Brown entourage in Hawaii, Nora became friends with Melinda Yee, and with Yee's parents as well, who were active Democrats in San Jose. In July of 1992, Nora attended the Democratic Convention, at Madison Square Garden. Shortly afterward, she donated twenty thousand dollars to the Democrats, and two of her daughters kicked in seventy-five hundred each. That same summer, Nora and Gene moved to Los Angeles, and there they became founding directors of an enterprise called the Asian Pacific Advisory Council-Vote, also known as APAC-Vote.

During the spring and early summer of 1992, politically active members of the Asian-American community in Southern California had heard that a couple from Hawaii was coming to unify the community's fund-raising efforts in the campaign, and most found it welcome news. "The Lums said, 'We came here from Hawaii to kind of organize the fragmented Asian community in Southern California,' " says Richard Choi Bertsch, a Los Angeles businessman who was organizing a Korean-American Democratic club at the time, and was one of the first people the Lums got in contact with. "I thought it made sense, because sometimes, just as in any community, people kind of grapple over who's going to be the leader . . . and it does make sense sometimes to bring in an outsider and have that person become a focal point and organize." Few in the community knew the Lums personally, but the couple did seem to have the official endorsement of the Democratic Party. Melinda Yee, who was obviously close to them, was well known and highly respected as an advocate, and her appointment by Brown to an important position in the D.N.C. was a source of pride. "In the case of Nora Lum, there was an apparent sanction from the D.N.C., although it wasn't quite clear to us what that was," says Ron Wakabayashi, a human-relations official with Los Angeles County, who was invited to join APAC that summer. "Still, to this day I am not quite sure if there was a direct or official relationship with the D.N.C. or not. But one appeared to exist."



As recently as last winter, the Democratic National Committee was unable to say whether Nora's organization was a sanctioned operation (the committee now says it was not), but at the time no one really pressed the issue; Nora said that her group was part of the D.N.C., and she could produce business cards and stationery bearing the committee's name to prove it. And she had Ron Brown. The chairman showed up at APAC's ribbon-cutting, in September of 1992, and visited the organization several times after that.

From the start, the Lums' operation seemed a bit unusual. Its headquarters was a nondescript warehouse—or, rather, the front part of a warehouse—in Torrance, an industrial suburb of Los Angeles. "It was not, in my view, a terribly effective operation," Wakabayashi says. "Operationally, it was not what you would generally find in a campaign, in a cohesive sense. . . . It seemed to me to be much more of a profile-raising activity"—that is, an activity whose purpose was to call attention to Asians' (and the Lums') participation in political events.

One early member and active supporter of APAC was John Huang, who was becoming well known as the banker from Lippo. Another, oddly, was Charles

Chidiac, the developer who claimed to have been cheated by Nora. Unaware that Chidiac had informed on her to the F.B.I., Nora made him a member of APAC, and he became a regular presence at the warehouse. It did not go unnoticed that Chidiac was Lebanese rather than Asian, and so Nora gave him his own organization—the Lebanese-American Advisory Council. It had business cards just like hers, bearing the name of Ron Brown and the Democratic National Committee. Chidiac explains that because Nora knew he opposed President Bush's Lebanese policy she recruited him to work for Clinton. He recalls that although Nora owed him the hundred and twenty-seven thousand dollars, she had the nerve to nag him to contribute to the Democrats through APAC. "I told her I didn't have the money," Chidiac says.

APAC's showcase event took place on October 27, 1992, a week before the election. It was a fund-raising awards ceremony honoring prominent Asian-Americans, and supporters were asked to attend by Clinton himself: a letter over his signature said that the event "will benefit the Democratic National Committee's Asian Pacific American Advisory Council." Clinton added that "representing me at the evening's events" would be Melinda Yee and Maria Haley, who had worked for Clinton in Arkansas. (Haley later became a director of the Export-Import Bank, and Yee followed Brown to the Commerce Department.) He also extended his "warmest congratulations to the honorees for their tremendous contributions to the community." Haley and Yee gave awards to, among others, Huang, Wakabayashi, and Chidiac. Each honoree received a certificate and a "little rock" from Arkansas.

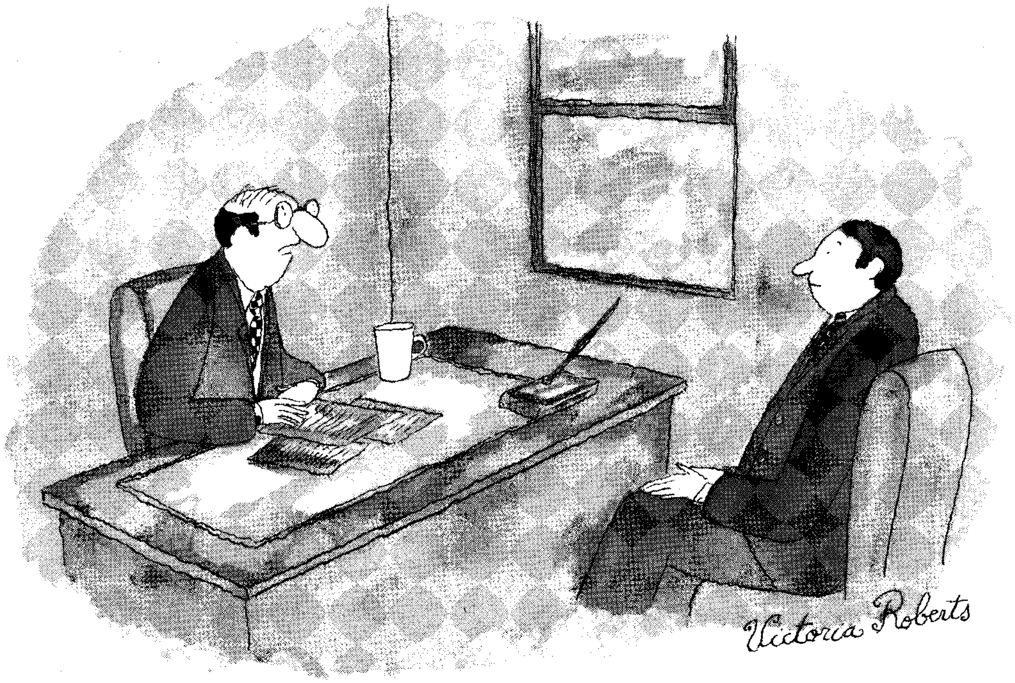
The fund-raiser appeared to have been successful, but it was hard to be sure, because no one seemed to know just how much money it had raised. Estimates from people who were there range from twenty-five thousand dollars to several times that, but the Lums apparently kept the information to themselves, and the D.N.C. has no record of the event. For that matter, the D.N.C. has no record of APAC's having raised any money during the 1992 campaign. Chidiac guesses that the full amount was around three-quarters of a million dollars, but the Lums, through their attorney, say it was something like seventy-five thousand dollars. Chidiac adds that John Huang gave heavily through APAC. Nora says that she did no fund-raising with Huang.

"How was it? Hissy fit or kissy face?"

There may never be a resolution of these disputes over APAC, because the Lums themselves have no APAC records. Their attorney says, "The reason they don't is that sometime in the last couple of years a car missed a turn, apparently, on the street by their house in Hawaii, smacked into it, and went in through what was a spare bedroom, where they had a whole bunch of their personal and other records stored. They have lost about four years of records that were damaged and destroyed in that—water damage and all kinds of stuff, which they've not been able to reconstruct." There was such a crash on June 1, 1994, and the Lums can produce an article from a local newspaper to prove it. "They're still looking," the attorney says. "They've got a storage place, and they're still looking through to see if they have any there . . . but they're afraid that they don't have them, that they were damaged when this car hit their house."

ALTHOUGH Nora was busy with APAC, she continued to pursue various moneymaking plans, one of which was trading in a speculative commodity called a German gold-backed bearer bond. One major speculator in the bonds even attempted to influence the Administration's policy toward Germany.

To say that such a bond is an exotic financial instrument is to understate the case dramatically. The bonds were authorized in the nineteen-twenties by the



"I graduated from film school, but you don't see me trying to make movies."

• •

Weimar Republic as a means of financing Germany's crushing war-reparations burden. Issued through Wall Street's top financial houses, the bonds were a great success, and millions were sold. Most of them held a face value of a thousand dollars and promised the bearer accumulated interest of six per cent or more at maturity—twenty or twenty-five years, in most cases—payable in gold coin of the United States. With the price of gold having multiplied exponentially since the nineteen-twenties, a single thousand-dollar gold-backed bearer bond might seem to be worth as much as seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars today, but Adolf Hitler, of course, after building the Third Reich's war machine, renounced all foreign debt. After the war, West Germany agreed to honor some of the bonds—but only those which passed rigorous ownership-verification tests, and not at the gold-standard value. (Gold was no longer the standard for United States currency.) Some of the bonds were thus redeemed, but collectors held on to the vast majority of them, hoping that someday Germany (perhaps even a reunified Germany) would make full, gold-value payment. No bond has been redeemed at full value, and monetary experts in Germany and in this country say that such redemption will never happen; the bonds are traded as "historical documents," usually with a wink and a nod, among an underground economy of true believers.

"What is a historical document suitable for framing to one guy may very well be a live instrument to another—you follow me?" William R. Morgan, a Texan who owns hundreds of the bonds, says. "You're talking to a man who controls fifty billion dollars' worth of German debt." The Securities and Exchange Commission, among other entities, considers bond "wealth" such as Morgan's nothing much more than pretty wallpaper, but that has not stopped associates of Morgan's from pressing the United States government to influence Germany to make full, gold-based redemption on the bonds. In October of 1996, one of Morgan's associates approached Bill Clinton with the offer of a five-million-dollar contribution to the 1996 campaign. That episode became controversial when Harold Ickes, then the deputy chief of staff, faxed the associate in Florida telling him how he might make part of the contribution through certain Democrat-allied nonprofit organizations. The donation was never made, but Morgan says that all his associate wanted was Clinton's promise to pressure Germany about the bonds. There is no indication that the Democrats ever made such a promise.

Morgan says that some American politicians got into the German gold-backed bonds themselves, especially after the Berlin Wall fell. One of them, Morgan says, was Ron Brown, who was represented by a woman from the D.N.C.—"a lady who had some property in Hawaii." That, of course, was Nora Lum. She bought several dozen German gold-backed bearer bonds at about the time she was starting APAC, and she told a partner of Morgan's, a San Diego lawyer named Larry Taggart, that she was representing Brown. "The redeemable value, if Germany paid full pop on it, would have been substantial," Taggart says. "Not to a country, but to the person." The association with Brown enhanced the purported prospect of a big payoff: if a prominent member of the government owned some of the bonds, perhaps Germany could be made to pay.

Lum's attorney now says that she is merely a collector ("She's willing to sell them to you, if you want them, if you're a collector"), but two APAC members remember having been approached by Lum about the bonds in 1992. "She had some kind of very twisted history about why these bonds had some kind of value," one of the members recalls. He adds that he showed the bonds to a friend in the financial community and was told to stay away.

As Election Day of 1992 approached, people around APAC began to hear Nora speaking vaguely about a prospect that awaited the Lums after the election. It had something to do with the oil-and-gas business in Oklahoma.

"She told me during the campaign that she was working on a project—a big project—and alluded to some gas company," Ron Wakabayashi says. No one could figure out why Nora was going to Oklahoma, a place she'd never been, or talking about the gas business, a subject she knew nothing about, but after the election the Lums left. "I knew they went off to Oklahoma, but I didn't have a clue why," Richard Choi Bertsch recalls. "It was another one of those questions about them."

As it turned out, Oklahoma was where the Lums found their big chance—a complex business deal cloaked in political intrigue, which, four and a half years later, is still being sorted out in the courts and by the authorities. The transaction represented a master stroke of *guanxi* maneuvering: the Lums became rich, their "son" Michael Brown (and possibly Ron Brown as well) benefitted lavishly, and an Oklahoma gas-gathering company was bankrupted.

That company, which was called Gage Corporation, was in deep distress in the summer and fall of 1992, when the Lums appeared on the scene. Gage had been on the losing side of a long and costly legal battle with Oklahoma's dominant public utility, Oklahoma Natural Gas, and one of Gage's co-owners, a dirt contractor named Jim Kitchens, was desperate to get rid of the company. He and his partner, Ron Miller, had searched for a buyer, but Gage was not an easy sell. For nine years, O.N.G. had been Gage's best—indeed, only—customer, but in 1989 it had reduced its Gage purchases, and Gage had now been squeezed to the point of near-destitution.

There was another complication in the background—a political controversy connecting O.N.G. and a second public utility, the Arkansas Louisiana Gas Company (Arkla), to illegal campaign contributions to a state regulator. Gage intended to fight O.N.G. in part by exploiting the scandal through its lawsuit. Thomas F. (Mack) McLarty, the chairman of Arkla at the time, has denied being aware of the contributions, and there is no evidence to the contrary. McLarty, of course, subsequently became President Clinton's chief of staff.

Kitchens hoped that in the Lums he had found the answer to his problems with Gage. The fund-raisers from Hawaii, it seemed, were not only ready to buy but politically connected. Where other suitors had turned away, the Lums rushed in and began negotiating to buy the company. From the start, they brandished their political connections, dropping remarks about their friendship with Ron Brown and about their access to the highest circles in Washington. "The Lums . . . come into the problem as potential saviors, in that they have connections with Democrats in power and perhaps they can alleviate the Gage problems with O.N.G.," Jim Kitchens's lawyer said, adding that Kitchens "expressed to me that it was a Ron Brown deal." In March of 1993, six months after the Lums arrived in Oklahoma and said they wanted to buy Gage, Miller explained the situation to Michael Satran, a Rockland County, New York, businessman who had had dealings with Gage in Oklahoma. "He told me there were people in Washington who were very anxious that this never see the light of day," Satran recalls. "Later on, he said to me that the person who was behind it was Ron Brown, who was Commerce Secretary but had been the head of the D.N.C., and in that position apparently didn't want this whole case to come up." The Lums themselves seemed eager to encourage the belief that they were actors in a larger design. Nora "was very cavalier with her statements," Ron Miller says. "She would come into the office and tell our employees, when they were interviewing them, that they were there from Washington to put this thing to bed, and they had massive power, right to the very top, and that's what they were there to do."

To help them with the deal, the Lums hired John Tisdale, of the Little Rock firm of Wright, Lindsey & Jennings, where Bill Clinton had once worked. In fact, Tisdale was one of Clinton's own lawyers. He had handled the disposition of Clinton's gubernatorial papers and had assisted in his legal affairs relating to the 1992 campaign. Tisdale quickly saw that the Lums knew nothing about the oil-and-gas business, and urged them to bring in someone who was familiar with it to advise them. Tisdale suggested another client of

"We spawned, but that was it."

his, who was successfully running a gas-gathering system in Oklahoma. But the Lums instead chose as their partner a man named Stuart Price, whom they found by calling the Democratic National Committee in Washington and asking for help. Their contact there called the office of the mayor of Tulsa, a Democrat, and he called Price, a well-connected Democrat whose wife, Linda Mitchell Price, was the niece of Senator George Mitchell, of Maine, then the Senate Majority Leader. Price himself had been a finance chairman for the Clinton-Gore campaign in Oklahoma, and had worked for the Clinton transition team.

O.N.G., eager to end the nagging dispute with Gage, offered the new buyers a lucrative gas-purchasing contract contingent on the settlement of the Gage lawsuit and the sale of Gage's assets. That sale occurred on November 9, 1993, and O.N.G.'s contract with the successful buyers—the Lums and Stuart Price, who named their new venture Dynamic Energy Resources—was lucrative indeed: within four months, Dynamic had sold its new gas contract for more than eighteen million dollars, covering the cost of purchasing Gage, and leaving a profit of more than nine million.

All this—the windfall profit, the Lums' partnership with Price, the involvement of Clinton's lawyer Tisdale—made the deal seem suspicious. Some have suggested that the Lums acquired Gage and dropped the suit against O.N.G. in part to spare McLarty embarrassing publicity concerning the accusation that his subordinates had made illegal campaign contributions—a suggestion that both the Lums and McLarty deny.

In January of 1993, the Lums attended the Inaugural bash thrown by Ron Brown, the outgoing chairman of the Democratic National Committee and the Commerce Secretary-designate; they sat at the head table. And when the parties were over and the new Administration got down to business Nora went to work, too. She was in and out of the White House regularly—more than a dozen times in the Administration's early months—providing names of people who she thought deserved Presidential appointments to jobs ranging from membership on a fisheries commission to a seat on the Supreme Court.

Initially, Nora's friend Melinda Yee, the former D.N.C. staffer, was posted to the office of White House personnel, where she helped Maria Haley fill places in the new Administration. Among the applications Haley asked Yee to track was that of Gene Lum: Haley recommended him highly for a job in international trade or transportation. One of the qualifications on Lum's résumé was that he had "coordinated a team of professional consultants to obtain all required governmental permits prior to construction" of a golf course. A note apparently written by Haley in the margin of Lum's application says, "Melinda, pls. track if we can put him on a board or commission." Lum did not get a job, but another candidate who came with Haley's "highly recommended" endorsement, the Lums' daughter Trisha, did get an entry-level job in Brown's Commerce Department.

Back in Oklahoma, the Lums' first notable act as majority shareholders of Dynamic Energy was to hire Michael Brown, the Secretary of Commerce's son. The younger Brown, like the Lums, had no experience in the oil-and-gas business, but he knew all about connections. Although he had not passed his bar exams, he had been hired as a Washington lobbyist by the Miami law firm Greenberg, Traurig, one of whose partners, Marvin Rosen, was about to become the finance chairman of the D.N.C. (and who presided over the now famous money hunt for the 1996 campaign). Michael Brown was made a member of the Dynamic board in 1994, and served briefly as acting president. The Lums gave Brown five per cent of the company's stock and the use of a sixty-thousand-dollar corporate membership in a Virginia country club, and paid him a hundred and sixty thousand dollars in dividends and seven thousand five hundred dollars a month in consulting fees. John Tisdale says that the Lums hoped that Michael Brown would be able to secure minority business for Dynamic.

The Lums also gave stock in Dynamic that paid a fourteen-thousand-five-hundred-dollar dividend to Helen Yee, the mother of Melinda Yee, who

AT THE GALLERIES

PETTY THOUGHTS

Mary Petty's beautiful, mysterious drawings first appeared in our pages in 1927. Over the next four decades, she produced a small but elegant body of work: thirty-eight covers and more than two hundred cartoons that are as inscrutable, and irresistible, today as when they first appeared. Twenty-eight of the covers, along with ten of the cartoons, are on display at Syracuse University's Lubin House, in Manhattan, through April 28th.

Petty composed her drawings with a classical sense of balance and rendered them with loving care. They are set, for the most part, in the richly brocaded interiors of the Peabody household, a Victorian matriarchy dominated by imperious dowagers and unfulfilled matrons. (Aging mother to partly bald, epicene son: "Rubbish! Lots of children are unwanted. Your father and I didn't want *you*.") Her earliest work shows the influence of her husband, the prolific cartoonist Alan Dunn, but she quickly established her own style, rendering her drawings in a fine pen line gently swaddled in halftones of Conté crayon. She moved beyond the traditional cartoonist's "box" and often molded her compositions into amoeba-like vignettes, which lent a welcome variety and distinction to our pages. For covers, she traded her crayons for watercolors, which she laid on in dozens of transparent layers, giving each original the sheen of a Victorian cameo.

Petty's most memorable creation remains the pie-faced maid who oils the gears of the Peabody household. Resourceful and uncomplaining, she occasionally shows unexpected flashes of assertiveness, as when she bests her mistress at double solitaire. In this 1942 cover, she wears a gas mask of the sort issued to civilians during the Second World War, and she seems transformed from a docile butterfly into a predatory insect. As she gazes into the mirror, can she be dreaming, just this once, of overpowering her endlessly demanding charges and dragging them off to her den belowstairs, there to devour them at her leisure? —Lee Lorenz

July 18, 1942

THE NEW YORKER

Price 15 cents

had left the White House to work for Ron Brown on such issues as international trade policy when Brown became Secretary of Commerce. In 1994, according to *Legal Times*, Dynamic Energy employees and owners contributed at least fifty-five thousand dollars to various Democratic causes.

One of the seemingly inevitable characteristics of the Lums' wheeling and dealing is disputation, and before long their sweet deal at Dynamic fell into discord. In late 1994, the Lums and the Prices had a falling out, and it led to a lawsuit the following year. Linda Mitchell Price accused the Lums of looting Dynamic to benefit themselves and their political friends. Stuart Price testified under oath about his former partners' reasoning in bringing in Michael Brown: "For them to gain influence with the Department of Commerce, and that's it." Linda Price testified that Helen Yee was made a board member and given stock to benefit Melinda. Nora "really wanted to give the stock to Melinda Yee, but since Melinda was an employee of the Department of Commerce she could not, so she gave it to Helen Yee instead," Mrs. Price said. Melinda Yee was in fairly regular contact with the Lums, and she failed to disclose at least one trip paid for by Dynamic, in violation of federal-employment rules. The suit was eventually settled.

John Tisdale concedes that the Lums frequently mentioned their friendship with Ron Brown but denies that they meant to derive any benefit from the relationship. "They dropped his name, and I've heard them—they dropped his name regularly with a lot of different people," Tisdale says. "But dropping somebody's name is substantially different from saying, 'This person is gonna help us.' " Besides, Tisdale points out, Brown was Secretary of Commerce, not of Energy, "and what good does that do for a gas-gathering system in the middle of Oklahoma?"

Actually, the Commerce Secretary could do a lot of good for a small joint-venture investment company looking for international deals, and that is what Dynamic Energy essentially was almost from the start, when it sold its gas-delivery contract with O.N.G. Brown was a radically new sort of Commerce chief—an activist, whose trade missions were business trips that resulted in deals. A place in a Ron Brown policy discussion—or, better, on a Brown trade mission—was a coveted prize, fiercely sought. Such access held the prospect of an enormous payoff. A Little Rock investment group called Entergy, for instance, returned from Brown's 1994 mission to China with a billion-dollar deal to build a power plant in Guangdong Province, with financing from Lippo, the Indonesian banking conglomerate. The possibilities for making *guanxi* on that China trip were so tempting that some American businessmen who were not in the official United States delegation were said to have approached low-level Commerce staffers in the hallways of Chinese hotels and begged to be allowed to enter a meeting room with them, so as to suggest connections.

Nora Lum, ever watchful, was considering deals that ranged from a Mexican shrimp farm to a Chinese shopping-center project. Nora was now a gas-industry executive (even if her company was delivering no gas), and in August of 1994, before the China mission, she was invited to meet with Brown and other Cabinet members to discuss Administration trade policy with Asia. In that group were executives from American Airlines, General Electric, I.B.M., and Westinghouse. Nora's name was placed on the proposed list of those who were to accompany Brown on his China mission—and then removed. (She says that she didn't make the trip because she was preparing for her daughter Maxine's wedding; Trisha Lum, who was then working at Commerce, did go.) In July, 1995, Nora and Trisha were guests at a White House state dinner honoring South Korea's President Kim Young Sam.

All this access impressed people. Shizutaka Yamamoto is a Japanese businessman who says that he met the Lums in Los Angeles and may have donated to the Democrats "indirectly" through them. The Lums say, through their lawyer, that they met Yamamoto at the first Clinton Inauguration, and deny knowledge of any dona-

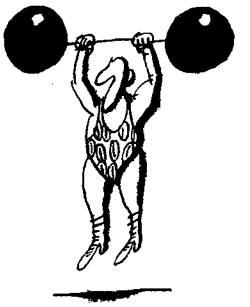
"It started out with lactose, but now he's intolerant of *__everything__*.*"*

tions. At the Inauguration, Yamamoto was disappointed that he did not get to meet the new President, but he adds that a few months later he received an invitation signed by Clinton to attend a social function at the White House. He was unable to go, but the framed invitation hangs proudly on a wall of his Tokyo office. "I think Nora and Gene arranged that," he says.

At the time of Ron Brown's death, on April 3, 1996, a team of investigators from the Office of the Independent Counsel was in Oklahoma, probing the coincidences and connections that had resulted in the creation of Dynamic Energy Resources. The independent counsel, Daniel Pearson, had been appointed a year earlier to investigate Brown's personal finances, and at first had focussed on a lucrative partnership with his close friend Nolanda Hill, a businesswoman who had given Brown a five-hundred-thousand-dollar payout on a venture he had started with her but in which he had made no initial investment. The counsel's inquiry eventually led to Oklahoma, where investigators subpoenaed records dealing with, among other subjects, Dynamic, Ron and Michael Brown, the Lums, APAC, Stuart and Linda Price, and Melinda Yee. The investigators wanted to know whether the Lums were improperly trying to gain influence at the Commerce Department, and whether Ron Brown had profited from the Dynamic deal.

The independent-counsel team's interest was broad, and its reach was far, extending all the way back to Hawaii, where F.B.I. agents were dispatched to interview, among others, Tony Locricchio, the attorney who had fought the Lums over the Maunawili golf course. Locricchio said that the F.B.I. asked for a copy of a deposition by Gene Lum in which he stated that he had no assets. "They made the comment 'Liar, liar, pants on fire' when they looked at Eugene's statements," Locricchio added. Agents also visited people in Los Angeles, asking what they knew about APAC, Dynamic, and the Lums' relationship with Brown. An associate of the Lums says he was surprised when two F.B.I. agents came to see him and asked what he knew about an offshore account that the Lums might have in the Cook Islands. He told the agents he didn't know anything about an offshore account.

The investigators were interested in the many possibilities. "One looks at it and says, 'What are these Hawaiians doing in Oklahoma with the President's ex-law partner and the Commerce Secretary's son?' " a person familiar with the investigation says. "You say, 'It just so happened that they met together and bought this company that had its own relationships with McLarty and others?' " This person added, "We were sitting there saying, 'Boy, if this is ever true, or we're able to prove it's true, this is going to be something.' But we just never got to that point."



When Ron Brown died, the independent counsel's investigation was shut down, and the material it had gathered during its yearlong inquiry was turned over to the Department of Justice. Inquiries into Brown's trade missions have produced no evidence of wrongdoing—or much else, for that matter. At Commerce, John Huang's secretary routinely shredded documents, including cables from overseas, and long before Melinda Yee left Washington, in the wake of Brown's death, she had thrown away all the notes she had taken on the trade missions.

The Justice Department has been slow to act, but it has renewed the investigation into some of the matters raised by the independent-counsel team. One Justice Department official described the inquiry as being currently "very active," and agents are again in the field, re-interviewing people who had been prepared to testify before the independent counsel's grand jury. Tisdale says, "We surmise that they are doing something, but we don't know what."

Gene and Nora Lum, meanwhile, have not let up in their political and business activities. The D.N.C. says that Nora gave a total of twenty thousand three hundred dollars in 1996. She and her husband were listed as both hosts and sponsors of last summer's Democratic National Convention gala honoring the President, which netted two and a half million dollars. Last fall, Nora visited the Commerce Department, apparently regarding a deal she had going in Russia. In January, Gene and Nora were among the guests at various Inaugural activities. After that, it was once again back to business, hitting the consumer-electronics trade-show circuit, along with Michael Brown, drumming up interest in a car-audio business that the Lums had acquired from an associate at APAC.

Back in Hawaii, Tony Locricchio continues to watch with a kind of sad bemusement as the Lums' saga unfolds. He couldn't help noticing their rise to the very highest circles of mainland politics. "They were able to build contacts into more than they were, and then to actually end up with fairly substantial contacts," Locricchio says. "There's this thing that happens with fixers, and that is the power of association. Image—being seen with the Ron Browns and the shakers and the movers. Nora really has a real need for that association. I have a friend who was in Washington for the last Inauguration, who saw the Lums there with Ron Brown's son. One would think that anybody in any Administration would keep these kinds of fixers at arm's length. But not much has happened to the Lums. They just continue to change the stage they play their parts on."

Nora and Gene Lum are not key figures in the campaign-finance drama that will be unfolding in congressional hearings and on the front pages, but they certainly embody the spirit that created it. A couple of small-time players from Hawaii, they recognized the moment when politics and dealmaking converged, and, in their own brilliant way, they seized it. While the controversies now surrounding them may eventually close some of the political doors they have opened for themselves, their business ventures appear to be proceeding at full throttle. That's what American *guanxi* is all about. ♦

PROFILE

THE TIME OF HER LIFE

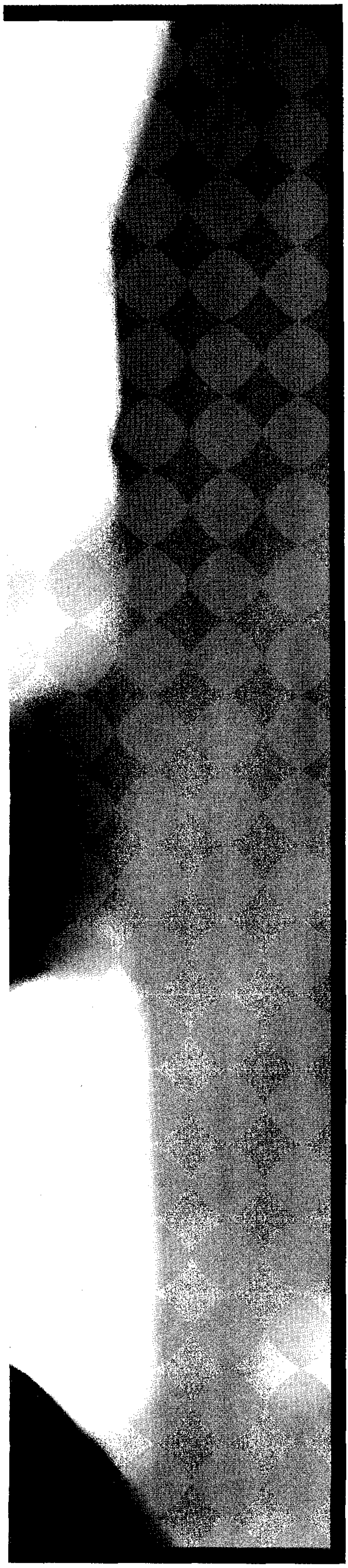
The playwright Wendy Wasserstein, famously the voice of her generation, is now also the voice of the establishment. How did a woman who has always seen herself as an outsider get there?

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

THE spin doctor was there. The distinguished white-haired senator from Indiana was there, with his charming new wife—his fourth. The conservative gay pundit was there. Two prominent women doctors in their early forties, one black (and Jewish), the other white—she was the senator's daughter and had recently been nominated by the President for the post of Surgeon General—were there, seated next to each other. Across the table from the nominee was her husband, a rumpled professor of sociology. A former student of his, a bright new star of neo-feminism and the author of "The Prisoner of Gender," was there. The well-known TV journalist was there. Seated between him and the sociology professor was the woman to whom all these people owed their very existence—a writer in her mid-forties who since the beginning of her career, twenty years ago, has heard herself described as "the voice of her generation" more times than she can count. Since 1989, when her play "The Heidi Chronicles" won a handful of major awards, including the Tony, people who introduce her at benefits, on TV talk shows, and at speaking engagements have attached the phrase "Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright" to her as predictably and proudly as wedding guests attach tin cans to the newlyweds' getaway car.

The writer is Wendy Wasserstein, and the others are characters she made up—the characters in her new play, "An American Daughter," which began previews at the Cort on March 20th and opens on April 13th. This day, February 12th, was the first day of rehearsals, and the actors who would become these characters were assembled for the first time, in a large studio near Lincoln Center, to read the play together as a company. It seemed a fitting coincidence that Wasserstein's play, which is set in Washington and has a heroine who is descended from Ulysses S. Grant, should begin coming to life on Lincoln's birthday. As has been the case with Wasserstein's plays from the outset of what the critic Robert Brustein calls "a remarkably golden career," when her first play, "Uncommon Women and Others," was produced in New York, in 1977, the cast is more or less heaven-sent: Kate Nelligan is Lyssa Dent Hughes, the nominee for Surgeon General; Lynne Thigpen is Judith Kaufman, Lyssa's best friend since their days at Miss Porter's School, and a senior physician in the women's oncology unit at a Washington hospital; Hal Holbrook is Lyssa's father, the senator; Peter Riegert is Walter, Lyssa's husband. Most of the actors had been committed for some time to doing the play, but—in case you've ever wondered why theatrical producers seem to *worry* so much—the part of the spin doctor had been cast only twenty-four hours earlier.

At ten o'clock that morning, I had met Wasserstein for breakfast at a coffee shop on Broadway, midway between her apartment, on Central Park West, and Lincoln Center. She was nervous—"An American Daughter" is her first play to go directly to Broadway, without an initial Off Broadway run—and she'd been up since six. "It's like the first day of school," she said. "You think you got the time wrong, everyone's waiting for you—you think you made a big mistake." Nevertheless, she likes this stage

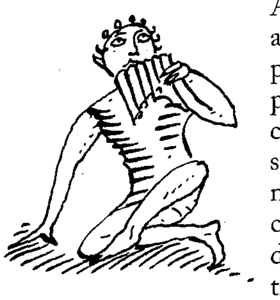


PHOTOGRAPH BY MAX VADUKUL

"I've always been funny," Wasserstein says, but, she adds, "funny is a complicated issue."

of the process, when a play is finally in the hands of the actors, and she can cut it around them. Wasserstein began writing "An American Daughter" two years ago and finished the first draft ten months later. (Meryl Streep and Whoopi Goldberg took the parts of Lyssa and Judith at the play's first reading.) She then began working closely with her director of choice, Daniel Sullivan, who also staged "The Heidi Chronicles" and "The Sisters Rosensweig," and last summer a new draft was read at the Seattle Repertory Theatre, where Sullivan is the artistic director. Another draft was completed around Christmastime, and another one just days before this rehearsal.

Wasserstein had told me at breakfast about a first-day ritual called "meet and greet": before the reading, all the people in the room had to introduce themselves briefly and say what their job was. Bernard Gersten and André Bishop, the executive producer and the artistic director of Lincoln Center Theatre, which is producing "An American Daughter," spoke first, symbolically releasing the play from drydock and launching it on its two-month shakedown cruise. When Wasserstein's turn came, she said simply, "Wendy Wasserstein, playwright." No applause, no star treatment had met her when she entered the studio, and none did when she introduced herself now. During the reading, she sat at one corner of the table, her face mostly hidden by wavy, shoulder-length brown hair as she looked down at her script and made notes on it with a black pen. Wasserstein, at the age of forty-six, has a bohemian, graduate-student look even when she's wearing tailored clothes. She could be said to resemble the character Janie Blumberg, the budding writer in her 1981 play "Isn't It Romantic": "Her appearance is a little kooky, a little sweet, a little unconfident—all of which some might call creative, or even witty." In "Bachelor Girls," a 1990 collection of personal essays, Wasserstein wrote that she was eight when she first decided she had a weight problem, and that she saw her first diet doctor when she was a sophomore in high school. The subject of weight still comes up in her writing—she mentions it in a diary she wrote for the on-line magazine *Slate* last fall—but she now treats it as a simple fact of life. She has a big smile and a loud, embracing laugh, and she projects an openness rare among New Yorkers and rare among writers; barely a day goes by that a stranger doesn't call out "Hi, Wendy!" as she walks down the street.



At the lunch break, she stopped to talk to Anne Cattaneo, the dramaturge at Lincoln Center. The two women have known each other since they were students at the Yale School of Drama, in the mid-seventies; Cattaneo worked on the Phoenix Theatre's production of "Uncommon Women," and she commissioned "Isn't It Romantic" for the Phoenix. She says that her job, in a way, "is to urge Wendy to write." Wasserstein, she says, "has grown so much in the mastery of her craft that my work with her is less about structure and through line than it is about whose story is this, and where is it going." They began discussing the coverage that Madeleine K. Albright, the new Secretary of State, was getting that week: the *Newsweek* cover that gushed "Mad About Madeleine," the stories about her children and her divorce, the huge amount of copy generated by the discovery that her grandparents were Jewish and had died in the Holocaust. There seemed no doubt that the personal slant of most of the stories was due to the fact that Albright was a woman: does anyone remember seeing a picture of Warren Christopher in the kitchen with his children? Wasserstein herself has no children and has never been married, and her conversation on any given day may contain observations about the way women are seen and judged, just as her work does. But this particular conversation had a particular relevance: she and Cattaneo couldn't help remarking, with a kind of gallows glee, on how uncannily the Albright coverage reflected one of the major concerns of Wasserstein's play, which is by far her most politically pointed work. In "An American Daughter," Lyssa Dent Hughes, a dedicated public servant, is virtually vivisected by the media not because of her qualifications but because of a minor oversight she committed. She becomes "the Lyssa Dent Hughes problem." Theatregoers will be reminded of, among others, Zoë Baird, Kimba Wood, and Lani Guinier, and of Hillary Clinton, who paid dearly for saying that she didn't want to stay home and bake cookies. When Wasserstein says that her play is in many ways about "the sadness of a generation," she's referring both to the personal sadnesses of the characters and to the sadness she feels about her generation's conduct in the political sphere; it has not escaped her notice that the generation she is so famously the voice of is the one that is now running the country.

In some ways that are fairly obvious, Wasserstein's work is lifted directly from her life. She often uses the names of friends and relatives for her characters. (Heidi Holland, of the eponymous "Chronicles," is named after two people: the set designer Heidi Landesman, a friend of hers from Yale, and David Hollander, her former lawyer; the surname of the sisters Rosensweig comes from the chef Anne Rosenzweig; Scoop, an unsuitable suitor of Heidi's, is the nickname of one of Wasserstein's nephews.) Wasserstein graduated from Mount Holyoke in 1971; Mount Holyoke in 1972 is the setting of "Uncommon Women and Others." In her late twenties, she turned down a marriage proposal from a nice Jewish lawyer; for further, roughly accurate details, see "Isn't It Romantic," in which Janie Blumberg turns down a marriage proposal from a nice Jewish doctor. But the appeal of Wasserstein's plays lies not so much in their attention to real-life details as it does in their attention to the big picture. Wasserstein's characters have a lot of questions about identity and self-determination, questions that women used to ask silently, if at all: What should my life be like? What if I do this? If I do this, can I still have that? What do I want? And do I really want it, or am I just supposed to want it? And if I don't want it, what do I do then? That's probably why so many women write letters to her or approach her on the street—"even women with big hair and big nails"—and say, "You've written my life." A few years ago, she wrote a profile of Tipper Gore for *New Woman;* in Wasserstein's apartment is a framed letter from Mrs. Gore, saying, "Thank you for the very accurate and articulate

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"This guy makes big money, but every penny goes to support his opulent life style. Let's give him a break."

rendering of moi! Finally somebody understands me—and naturally it would be *you.*"

At the beginning of Act II of "The Heidi Chronicles," Heidi, an art historian, is teaching a class in a lecture hall at Columbia University. Comparing two portraits of women, she says, "What strikes me is that both ladies seem slightly removed from the occasions at hand. They appear to watch closely and ease the way for the others to join in. I suppose it's really not unlike being an art historian. In other words, being neither the painter nor the casual observer, but a highly informed spectator." Likewise, Wasserstein's sense of herself as an outsider runs deep. In an essay about winning the Tony which appears in "Bachelor Girls," she wrote that "having fashioned a life based on anticipated exclusion—my date left with the blond; they gave the prize to the boy; the woman in the Anne Klein suit and the legs got the job—it came as a genuine surprise, a shock, when, for the first time ever, the winner was me."

Exclusion isn't the word that comes to the minds of most casual observers when they think of Wasserstein's life. She herself told me that a friend of hers once said to her, "You've made knowing people into an art." Everybody may be connected to everybody else by six degrees of separation (to use the phrase made famous by the play of that title by John Guare—who is a friend of Wasserstein's), but the world that Wasserstein travels in is ruled by a kind of celebrity mathematics; she seems to be connected to everybody who is anybody by a mere two degrees.

Wasserstein has said that she is drawn to people "who get the jokes," and one of the pleasures of being in her company is that she makes you feel that you are one of those people. When she laughs in your presence, you cannot fail to be delighted—and, maybe mistakenly, somewhat flattered. Even those who aren't fully in her aesthetic camp recognize her gift for friendship. Robert Brustein, who was the dean of the Yale School of Drama when Wasserstein was there (along with Streep, Sigourney Weaver, and the playwright Christopher Durang), says of Wasserstein's work, "I've been a little tough on her in print. I think she has one more step to take as a writer. I thought that she was getting there with 'The Heidi Chronicles,' and that she took a step back with 'The Sisters Rosensweig.' Wisecracks come too easily to her." On the subject of Wasserstein herself, Brustein has no reservations: "She's an incredibly sweet and decent human being. That combination of sweetness and wit is rare, and people embrace her for that. Being with Wendy, you feel like you're having a bubble bath, or an ice-cream soda." Wasserstein's face is a little like Scotland, though: the sun may be shining now, but you know that pretty soon it's going to rain. People who call her answering machine hear her humming cheerful Rodgers and Hart tunes like "Mountain Greenery" and "Manhattan"; in person, her face will suddenly break off in the middle of "Get Happy" and switch to "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen." Leonard Berkman, a theatre professor at Smith, who was Wasserstein's first playwriting teacher, says, "She's a person who thinks behind her face. She's thinking constantly, and you'll have these moments of silence. Wendy carries a fund of sadness within her. No matter how accepted she is, she's very attuned to her own unique perspective and doesn't expect to be understood by other people."

Wasserstein still has close friends from childhood and college; in January, she went to Boston to attend a former roommate's wedding. (The roommate was the model for Muffet in "Uncommon Women.") A couple of weeks after that, while she was deep into rewriting "An American Daughter" and was also spending long hours finishing a screenplay with the director Nicholas Hytner, who is one of her best friends

TUNNEL OF COURT-ORDERED RECONCILIATION
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(he is among a handful of men whom Wasserstein refers to as her "husbands"), I followed her to London, where she was to be a maid of honor at a wedding that was widely covered in the British press: her friend Flora Fraser, the daughter of the biographer Lady Antonia Fraser and the stepdaughter of Harold Pinter—and the author of two biographies herself—was marrying Peter Soros, the nephew of George Soros. On a Friday night less than two weeks before rehearsals for her play were to begin, Wasserstein found herself in a movie studio on the outskirts of London, at a dinner dance for three hundred people. She was wearing a long skirt and a tapestry jacket that she'd bought that day at Harrods. She'd forgotten to bring an evening bag on the trip, so she carried a black plush makeup bag. There were actually only a few people she knew at the party: Sonny and Gita Mehta (Wasserstein is working on a childhood memoir for Sonny Mehta, the editor-in-chief of Knopf), and Stephen and Cathy Graham (Stephen, a son of Katharine Graham and the founder of New York Theatre Workshop, is another of her Yale friends).

Later that evening, Wasserstein reported to me that the man sitting next to her at her table had asked her what kind of plays she wrote, and, not wanting to get into an extended conversation, she had said merely, "Comedies"; his response was "Yes, you look like you'd be good for a few chuckles." Wasserstein has a very good ear for the telling quote. She will often float a loaded remark in front of you without including her response, in order to preserve some of its power for future use and also, I think, to preserve relationships with people who might not speak so freely to her if they thought she was judging them. Wasserstein uses her skills on herself, too. Toward the end of the party, a huge breakfast buffet appeared, and Wasserstein and I sat by ourselves in a corner of the room eating sausages and eggs and bacon. Out of the blue, she started laughing. With a characteristic mixture of amusement, detachment, and enthusiasm, she said, "What am I doing here, eating *treyf* at two o'clock in the morning?"

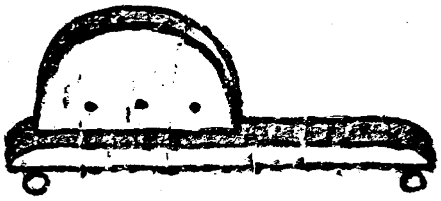
WASSERSTEIN likes to travel, and she likes to stay in hotels. Until December, when she moved into her apartment on Central Park West, she had been living for a year at the Lowell Hotel, on the East Side, and was very happy there. She likes her new apartment (there's nothing not to like, unless you don't like lots of space and east, north, and south light), but it makes her a little uneasy. "It's my first grownup apartment," she says. "That I even *have* an address is a surprise to many of my friends." Wasserstein doesn't cook, but she wanted an eat-in kitchen, because that meant "home" to her. The dining room doubles as her assistant's office, and pages of Wasserstein's play are scattered about. A drawing of Edith Evans, given to her by the director Gerald Gutierrez (he's one of her "husbands," and his entry in *Who's Who* lists Wasserstein as his ex-wife), is on the wall, and next to it is a drawing of Ellen Terry that used to belong to Eva Le Gallienne. It was a gift from the second cast of "The Sisters Rosensweig." The living room is the biggest room, and Wasserstein says she almost never uses it. Her two cats, Antonia (named for Lady Antonia) and Rocket (who, according to her owner, has a huge crush on Nick Hytner), use it a lot. On a table of photographs of family and friends, there's a picture of Wasserstein shaking hands with Hillary Clinton, and hanging next to the fireplace is one of Wasserstein's two Vanessa Bell paintings, this one showing Bell's sunny sitting room at Charleston. The living room offers a view of Tavern on the Green, as does the sitting room next to it, which Wasserstein, using Mount Holyoke terminology, calls "the date parlor."

It is a truism that single people in New York are out every night, but in Wasserstein's case the truism is pretty much true. On any given night, she may be having dinner with one of her husbands—Hytner, Gutierrez, André Bishop, the playwright Peter Parnell—or with Heidi Landesman or the director Carole Rothman. She may meet one of her media friends for a drink: Michael Kinsley, if he's in town, or Charlie Rose, or Forrest Sawyer, or Frank Rich (who recused himself from reviewing Wasserstein's work when he was the *Times'* chief drama critic). Several times a year, she gets together for dinner with a group of women which includes the writer Judith Thurman, who helped her decorate her apartment. Sometimes she has dinner with the designer Mario Buatta ("the prince of chintz") or the party planner Robert Isabell. She might agree to be a co-host, along with Stephen Sondheim, of a party to celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of Young Playwrights Inc. She might agree to participate in a benefit reading at Lincoln Center Theatre, if André Bishop asks her to. At some point, she may have to go to a meeting at the offices of New York's flagship public-television station, where she is on the board, or to Washington, for a meeting about the Kennedy Center Honors, since she is on its selection committee. Part of the reason she does as much as she does is that, as she says, "I'm a good girl." But she's also a writer, and her eyes and ears are open. "Maybe other people go to these things because you never know who you might meet. I say, you never know what you might see." Those words echo what Heidi says about a painting in the prologue to "The Heidi Chronicles": "Frankly, this painting has always reminded me of me at one of those horrible high school dances. And you sort of want to dance, and you sort of want to go home, and you sort of don't know what you want. So you hang around, a fading rose in an exquisitely detailed dress, waiting to see what might happen."

WASSERSTEIN, who was born in Brooklyn in 1950, is the youngest of four children. The eldest, Sandra, who is thirteen years older than Wendy, is a pioneering and successful businesswoman (Wasserstein wrote a piece about her last year for this magazine) and the model for Sara in "The Sisters Rosensweig." Wasserstein regards her as almost a second mother. Georgette, who with her husband owns an inn in Vermont, is the second oldest; her nickname is Gorgeous, and it's not a coincidence that the middle sister in "The Sisters Rosensweig" is named Gorgeous. The one sibling who has not shown up in Wendy's work—except in a musical called "Miami," which didn't take off—is her brother, Bruce, a high-profile, occasionally controversial investment banker, who is as much a fixture in the financial world as Wendy is in the theatrical world. "I'm saving him," she says. "He might show up in the next one. I have an idea for a new play after this one that's sort of a romance, called 'Old Money.' " Wasserstein doesn't mix much with her brother's set, but she and Bruce, who is the elder of the two by three years, were extremely close when they were younger, and she says that in her friendships with both gay and straight men "there are a lot of brother figures." Bruce Wasserstein's office, on West Fifty-second Street, has framed posters from his sister's plays on one wall. I asked him if he could explain his and his siblings' success in the world.

"The first thing is, we all would take that with a grain of salt," he said. "I don't think Wendy perceives herself as successful; I certainly don't see myself as successful. But we all have a sense of curiosity and some sense of the big picture. What I mean by that is no one cared about how you were doing in school, but you were taught to think conceptually about what's important. There was an atmosphere of free-wheeling thinking." About his sister's work and life he says, "There may be the hidden pain. There also may be the hidden satisfaction. In many ways, she does have a comfort with who she is." Bruce's daughter Pamela, who is now a freshman at Harvard, is the subject of Wasserstein's first book for children, "Pamela's First Musical," which was published last year. In the book, the fabulous New York City aunt whisks her niece Pamela off to a show for her ninth birthday. Bruce says, in an amused-big-brother way, "Wendy likes to think of herself as sort of an Auntie Mame, and she's saving my children from their lives dominated by the stuffed shirts from Wall Street." (Wendy's interpretation of the family's dynamics is a little different. Pointing out that her brother was born on Christmas Eve, she says, "It works out to: Sandra's really smart, Gorgeous is really gorgeous, I'm really funny, and Bruce is the Christ child.")

Both of Wasserstein's parents—she refers to them as Morris and Lola in conversation, but to their faces they are Mother and Daddy—are immigrants from Poland. (Lola's name was originally Lisë.) Morris Wasserstein, who is now retired, was in the ribbon business and invested in small office buildings in Manhattan. (Bruce told me that he invented a process for cutting ribbons which kept the edges from unravelling.) He's retired now, but, Bruce says, "he's always thinking. He's sort of a dreamer. Mom is less thinking, but always doing." When Wendy was twelve, her family moved from Brooklyn to the Upper East Side. She went to high school on the West Side, at Calhoun (she didn't get into any of the top schools on the East Side), which was then an all-girls school. She says that she was not a particularly good student, because "I'm vaguely dyslexic," and adds, "I truly believe that one of the reasons I write plays is that you learn from listening to people." It was while she was a student at Calhoun that she had her first taste of public speaking—on a World Youth Forum television panel sponsored by the *Herald Tribune*—and, despite her natural shyness, she found it very much to her liking.



There was a lot of activity and cultural enrichment in the Wasserstein household—the kids were regularly taken to plays and musicals—but there wasn't an abundance of communication. Wendy didn't learn until she was twenty-three that her mother had previously been married to Morris Wasserstein's brother. When I asked her how her parents met, she said, "It's complicated." She hesitated for a moment, then went on, "My mother married two Wasserstein brothers, and the first Wasserstein brother died, and then she married my dad. I found it out when I was up at Yale." This discovery was accompanied by the revelation that her sister Sandra was the child of the first marriage and was about six when her father died. "So Sandra's also my cousin," Wasserstein explains. The subject is still not discussed much in the family. "When we were growing up, they never said that people died," Wasserstein says. "They said they went to Europe."

There is no "Lola Dearest" in Wasserstein's œuvre, but even though she hasn't stuck pins in her mother's wings she has occasionally caught her in a butterfly net and studied her. Janie's mother in "Isn't It Romantic" is a thinly disguised piece of Lolaology. And in an essay about her mother in "Bachelor Girls" she wrote, "Lola Wasserstein has always made great copy. And she has always lived up to her reputation." That reputation includes showing up at Wendy's apartment in New Haven, when she was at Yale, dressed as Patty Hearst, with a beret and a toy gun. The reputation includes, as Wasserstein reported in her *Slate* diary, meeting her daughter for breakfast wearing leather pants. The reputation includes not cooking and a rather hellish interest in health food (the family ate a lot of raw vegetables) and in fitness (she was addicted to jazz-dance classes). Wendy took dance classes beginning at the age of eight, and she still likes to dance, but she sometimes found her mother's perpetual motion overwhelming, and an act she was not inclined to follow. Christopher Durang, who has been a friend of Wasserstein's for twenty-five years, says, "I think Wendy's mother is fascinating and maybe a little unknowable. One of the things Wendy used to tell me about her mother—and it just seemed funny, but, looked at from another perspective, maybe it suggests something going on underneath—was that she would go to three or four dance classes a day. So Wendy, almost in contrast, would sometimes be the opposite of her mother, and be very lethargic. Her mother would see her lying on the couch, and it would be like eight o'clock in the morning, and she would say, 'Body! Get up, body! You have to move!' And of course when you get pressured to do anything, you always want to do the opposite." (Durang also told me that once, when he was visiting the family's apartment, on the Upper East Side, Wasserstein opened the kitchen cabinets, and, as he put it, "I think there was a little pile of Sweet'n Low and some instant coffee, and that was it.")

Wasserstein has written that she loves Lola "more than just about anyone else," but it also seems true that her work and her life are in many ways a reaction to Lola's influence, and that to this day all Lola has to do to get under her daughter's skin is to pick up the phone. Not long ago, Wasserstein told me, "Lola called me today and she said, 'Guess what? Chelsea Clinton got into Harvard.' " Wasserstein didn't comment further on this remark, but it was clear that it contained, somehow, a cosmic maternal rebuke.

WASSERSTEIN was half the age she is now when she wrote "Uncommon Women," whose best-known line is one that's repeated several times in the play by the live wire Rita: "When we're thirty we're going to be pretty fucking amazing." At the end of the play, in a scene that's set six years after graduation, Rita changes the age at which amazingness will occur to forty. Now Wasserstein and her peers—and the central characters in "An American Daughter"—are well into their forties, and they have found that being amazing has its own disappointments. Wasserstein says that her earlier plays "had to do with choice"; in "An American Daughter" the characters have already made choices, and some of the doors in front of them are now locked. Judith, at the age of forty-two, has to come to terms with the realization that she will never be able to conceive a child; Lyssa "has it all," only to find that others want to take it away, for no better reason than that they can. One of the most powerful scenes in the play revolves around a Jewish ritual called the Festival of Regrets, after which Judith expresses her profound feeling of failure over not being able to bring life into the world. Lyssa says to her, "What gives you the audacity to believe you've failed if you can't make life or stop death?" Judith replies, "Because I was taught if I was a good girl and worked hard, I could." Cattaneo says of Wasserstein's plays, "She's really writing for us what we are living. As she writes it, she figures out how she feels about it."

One of the signal ways that Wasserstein expresses how she feels is, of course, through her celebrated sense of humor. (Anyone who knows even a little of her work can imagine what hay she makes of the Festival of Regrets.) "I've always been funny," she says. "I'm the youngest in a family of very large personalities, so truly one way to get by is to be nonthreatening." But she adds, "Funny is a very complicated issue." While a sense of humor in a man is universally regarded as a good thing, a sense of humor in a woman is often thought of as a handicap—an unnatural growth that obscures rather than reveals her femininity. It often leads to popularity, but only rarely does it lead to intimacy. Wasserstein says, "It's always 'You'll love her, she's really funny,' not 'I'm *in* love with her, she's really funny.' " She adds, "When I was young, the word I had the most trouble saying was 'feminine.' I kept saying 'femimine.' And I always thought, Oh, she's a girl, and I'm not a girl. I still think that. If you're smart and you're funny, that's a problem, too, 'cause then you're not a girl. It's very deep, those feelings—and at some point they're sort of nuts, because, bottom line, you are a girl and I'm a girl, and those feelings have to do with somebody else's image of what it is to be a girl."

In Wasserstein's work, being funny has been her bread and butter. But it has also been something of a bane. People expect her to be funny, and yet she is sometimes criticized for being too funny, or just funny. (When I reviewed a revival of "Uncommon Women" in 1994, I found myself using the word "shtick.") Wasserstein says, "I get, 'When are you going to show your anger? When are you going to show your serious side?' But humor is a way of creating character. Judith, in the new play—that humor is her anger."

Christopher Durang was Wasserstein's closest friend at Yale, and he has actually known her slightly longer than she has known him: he worked in the registrar's office and read her application. The photo she sent in, he said, "looked hostile," but the play she submitted, called "Any Woman Can't," about a Smith graduate who blows a

SUPER REGO

Paula Rego, Portuguese-born and London-based, is best known as a surrealistic storyteller with a penchant for scenes of girls and animals at play; here she tells a grim tale of sexual frustration. In "The Policeman's Daughter" (1987), a hard, dour woman—a girl no longer—sits in her father's heavy, studded chair, lavishing elbow grease on the old man's jackboot. The cat, scratching its claws, contemplates escape, an option that seems forever closed to its mistress. A retrospective exhibition of Rego's work is currently on display at the Tate Gallery, Liverpool.

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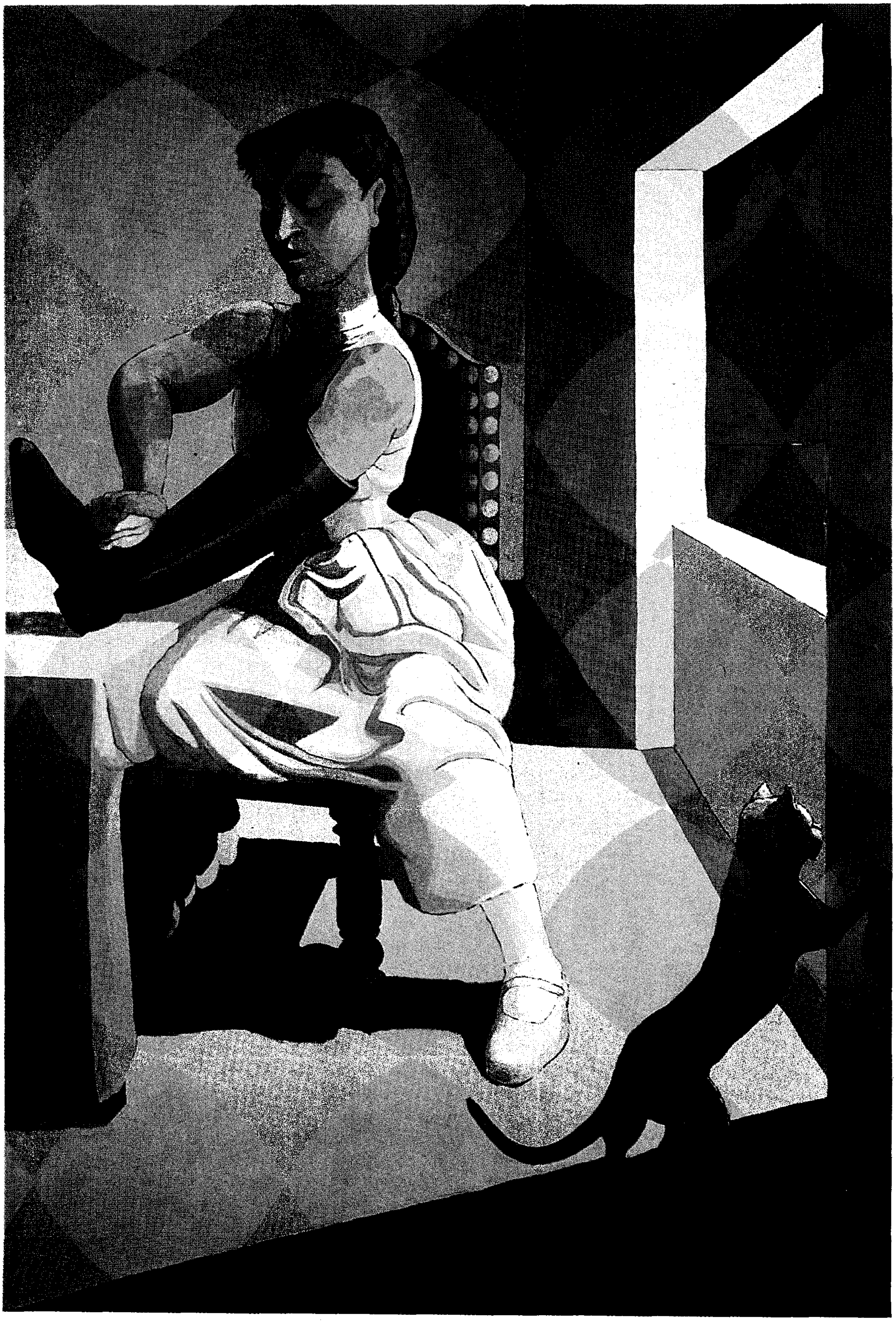
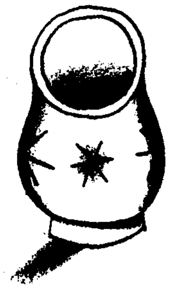


tap-dancing audition and then ruins her life by marrying the wrong man, made him laugh. He says that it has been easier in some instances for her to express her feelings in print than in person. "I think that Wendy, as the youngest in the family, often ended up with charm and with making light of things, so I think an issue for her sometimes is being able to acknowledge when something has upset her. Although I've been remarkably struck, from 'Uncommon Women' on, that she would be very nakedly vulnerable in her writing, and I feel that audiences respond to that, and that's been one of the reasons for her success."

Wasserstein says, "These are plays of ideas—in some ways, I wish I *could* write a farce. I would love for my next play to have eight doors onstage and have people coming in with feather dusters. People say, 'She's commercial,' or 'Her plays are just like Neil Simon's.' I like Neil Simon. I think he's a real craftsman. But then you think, No, 'The Heidi Chronicles' is about the women's movement. This man is not obsessed with what I'm obsessed with. I don't think he came of age at a women's college at a time of change. I don't think so."



That the time of change Wasserstein refers to didn't lead to a golden age of equality is addressed in "The Heidi Chronicles," when Heidi, speaking to the alumnae of her high school, says, "It's just that I feel stranded. And I thought the whole point was that we wouldn't feel stranded. I thought the point was that we were all in this together." Wasserstein's new play goes over similar ground, but more in anger than in sorrow. When Lyssa Hughes says during an interview on national television that her mother was the kind of Indiana housewife who made icebox cakes and cheese-pimiento canapés, she finds herself on the front page of a tabloid: next to a picture of her taken at a supermarket is the headline "DR. ICE BOX SHOPS." Suddenly everyone she knows is showing up on every talk show and every op-ed page to attack or defend her. A spin doctor is called in to make the patient more down-home and less Bryn Mawr. The President, whose wife was a college classmate of Lyssa's, stops calling. Polls say that "the women of America" are against her. At no point during this bacchanalia of talking heads is there any serious discussion or debate of health-care issues.

Wasserstein, in standing up for her principles, may be stepping on a few toes in this play. She objects to the fact that the primary message of the media is that "it's all grist for the mill, and the mill is more important." But some of the people she uses to illustrate her position are big-time gristmill operators, and they are also her friends. Charlie Rose is a friend; there's a wee joke about his show. Forrest Sawyer is a friend; the TV journalist who's just doing his job by airing the unfairly damaging interview is named Timber Tucker. It's possible that Wasserstein will no longer be quite so welcome a guest at the media club, but in truth she's not unsympathetic to its members, and she can almost see herself in their shoes: she speculates that if she hadn't been a playwright she might have ended up a talking head herself. "You know, just get up and be witty," she says. "I can do that." In "An American Daughter," Wasserstein seems to be answering the critics who find her social humor too glib: "Part of me gets angry—I think, You want not funny? You want to know what's under here? You want not the jokes? There are not jokes here. There's the jokes and there's not the jokes. It goes back and forth."

Wasserstein told me that a few years ago she was going through a period of sadness in her life, and that she wrote this play partly to help her escape her "personal undertow," which is something she says she has been dealing with since her days in graduate school. About ten years ago, around the time she began working on "The Heidi Chronicles," whose main character adopts a baby on her own at the end of the play, Wasserstein began thinking about having a child: "For the last ten years, I've been saying, 'I have to decide, I have to decide.'" Her tentative plan now, she says, is to adopt a child sometime in the next year; she has already set the legal wheels in motion. She doesn't regret not getting married, however. "You just go about your life. It's when you hear other people's opinions about your life that you think about it." Wasserstein comes from a family whose attitudes toward marriage are, she says, "hard-core." She goes on, "At the opening-night party for 'The Sisters Rosensweig' at Tavern on the Green, my mother said to one of my friends, 'Wouldn't this be nice if it was Wendy's wedding?'" But marriage per se has never been a particular goal of hers: "It's not 'a husband.' It's 'who?'" For Wasserstein, "the larger issue is about children." She adds, "I'm both romantic enough and cuckoo enough that it's not about marriage—romance isn't a legal issue or an issue of convention for me."

TWO days before the first preview of "An American Daughter," Wasserstein was in Rockford, Illinois, speaking about "The Heidi Chronicles" at a women's luncheon. The next day, she's back at rehearsals at the Cort. Far below a scene of courtly love painted on the theatre's ceiling, other scenes are being played out on the stage, in front of the stage, and underneath the stage. Downstairs, in the basement, a gray-painted locker-roomy area, Jane Greenwood, the costume designer, is checking to see how a new outfit for Elizabeth Marvel, who plays Quincy Quince, the young neo-feminist, has turned out; someone is ironing a costume; a washer and dryer are running; a coffeemaker and paper cups—essential props for the cast and crew—are at the ready next to a curtained-off wardrobe room. Upstairs, members of the lighting crew are standing in the middle of the orchestra section, wearing headsets and working on computers that have been lined up on boards placed across the tops of the seats. A few rows in front of them, Roy Harris, the stage manager, watches the action on the stage on a couple of monitors. Wasserstein is seated in an aisle seat to the right of the orchestra, and Harris, who is overseeing his third Wasserstein production, looks up frequently to wave and smile at her. Dan Sullivan sits thoughtful and silent on the opposite side of the theatre. Up on the stage, Peter Riegert chews a toothpick and takes advantage of a short break to snap some pictures of the set and of Marvel and Hal Holbrook, who are sitting a few rows in front of Wasserstein. In a few moments, Riegert and

Marvel begin rehearsing a scene from Act II, in Walter and Lyssa's Georgetown living room, which is a creation of John Lee Beatty. Like "The Sisters Rosensweig," this play takes place on a single set, and the finishing touches are still being pondered—a large abstract painting next to the fireplace will be gone tomorrow, replaced by something smaller and less distracting. As Wasserstein watches and listens, Harris's young assistant brings her a card that has printed on it all the backstage phone numbers, and several revised pages of the script, which incorporate some cuts and changes that she made the day before.

Holbrook gets up and comes over to Wasserstein. "Hello, darlin'," he says, and gives her a kiss. Taking note of the fact that in just a few hours "An American Daughter" will be performed for the first time in front of an audience—a select group of about eighty people—Holbrook says, "Well, tonight we find out if there are any laughs in your play, aside from the ones that *we* like." He sits down in front of Wasserstein and brings up the story that was front-page news the day before—Anthony Lake's removing himself from consideration for the directorship of the C.I.A., and the eloquent disgust he expressed about the confirmation process in his letter to the President. The situation didn't precisely parallel the plot of "An American Daughter," but the similarities are striking, and a little later in the rehearsal Penny Fuller, who plays Holbrook's wife, leans down from the stage and calls over to Wasserstein, "I figured you weren't here yesterday because you were resting up after writing Anthony Lake's speech."

The scene that Riegert and Marvel are working on involves not just national politics but generational politics. Walter is a liberal whose ideas, as espoused in his book "Towards a Lesser Elite," have fallen out of favor. Quincy is a political opportunist: a perky sound bite in a miniskirt, she gives lip service to the feminists who made her career possible, but her ruling principle seems to be the more media exposure the better; she's not concerned so much with making demands as she is with being in demand. In this confrontation between the old and the new, Wasserstein is showing her age in several ways. At lunch earlier, she remarked to me that a woman in her twenties had said to her the other day, "We never talk about being a feminist. We don't use that word." Typically, Wasserstein refrained from commenting. Nevertheless, the judgment is there, like the smell of gunpowder after a bullet is fired. In this case, the judgment is one of disapproval and disappointment; it's one thing to encounter resistance to feminism—the word and the concept—from the generation ahead of you, and quite another to see the generation behind you blithely dismissing the foundation that you've built your life upon. At the same time, the encounter between Walter and Quincy shows growth in Wasserstein's thinking and writing about men: Walter is fully realized as a character in his own right. "In this new play, Walter is interesting," Wasserstein said to me, in a tone of objective fascination, as if she were performing exploratory surgery on herself. "He has sensitivity and a sadness. I watched him the other day and I felt mature"—she pronounced it, self-consciously, "ma-tyoooer." Laughing, she added, "Just *slightly*." The feeling came from "the sense that I could imagine what his life was like—he seemed less narcissistic to me."

During the next break, Riegert comes up the aisle. "Hi, doll," Wasserstein says to him. He hi-dolls her back. Kate Nelligan, who entered at the end of the scene—she and Sullivan spent several minutes figuring out when she should descend the staircase at the back of the stage in order to appear in the living room at the right moment—comes up and says hello, too, and Wasserstein, lapsing into the parodic Jewish-matron accent she tends to use when she's discussing her own or anyone else's appearance, and holding her hand in the horizontal nail-polish-display position, says, "Kate, the hair is good." Sixteen years ago, Riegert played Marty Sterling, the nice, single Jewish doctor in "Isn't It Romantic"; Wasserstein, beholding the couple before her now, says, "My mother will say, 'It's the doctor—and he got married!' " ♦

"Wait! First, his attorney."

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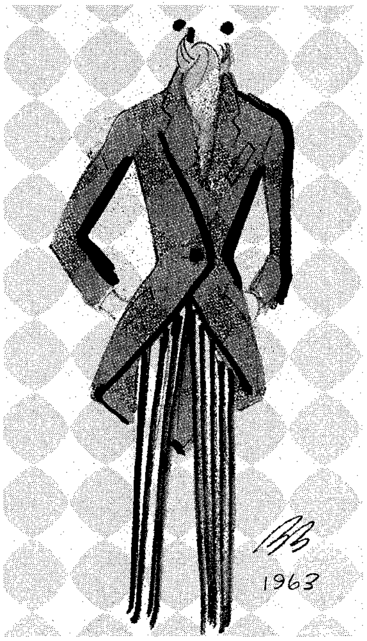
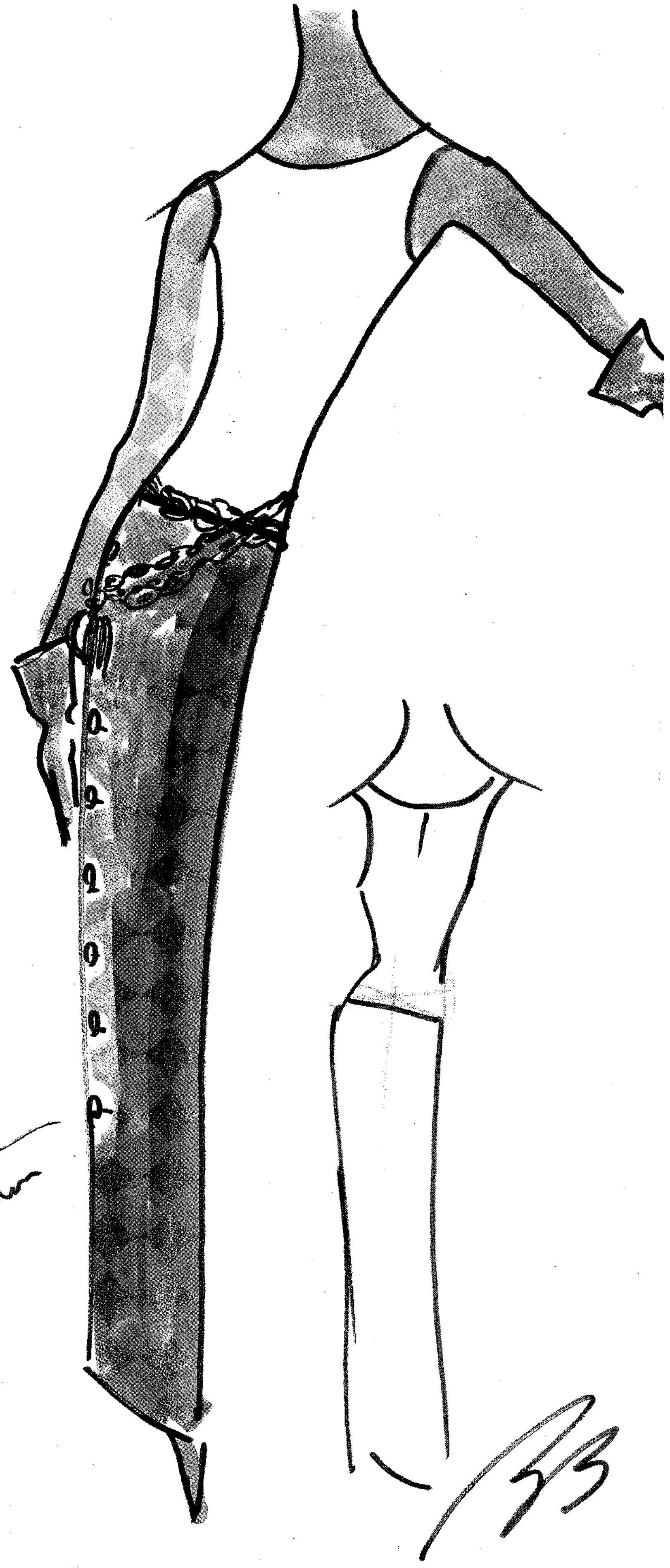
ALBUM BY BILL BLASS

AMERICAN GALS

IT was in the Ritz Bar, in Paris, back in the fifties, when all the French women were dressed in Dior's New Look, that I first realized the considerable style of American women. C. Z. Guest was at the Ritz, and one day she came in for lunch dressed just as if she were in her country house on Long Island—twin-sweater set, tweed skirt, three strands of pearls, hatless, of course, and a small bag over her arm. Gloria Vanderbilt was there, too, wearing a white crêpe shirt, gray flannel pants, flat shoes, and a sable coat. They both wore the sort of thing that would look totally acceptable today, but that wasn't at all the case with women who were simply following the latest French fashion. American women have a way of wearing clothes which doesn't date them. The best-dressed ones—Mona Williams, Pauline Potter, the Duchess of Windsor—have had a sense of themselves which hasn't depended in the least on what the world was wearing. And so it came to me that there could be a way of designing for women that was, in the best sense, *American.*

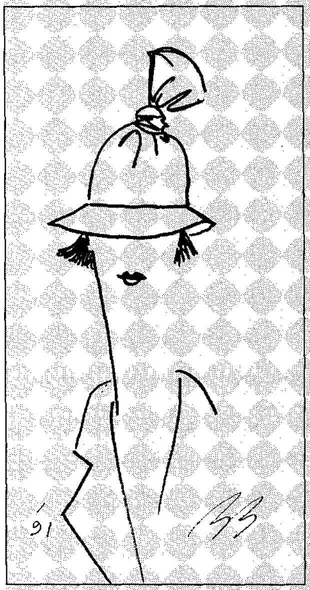


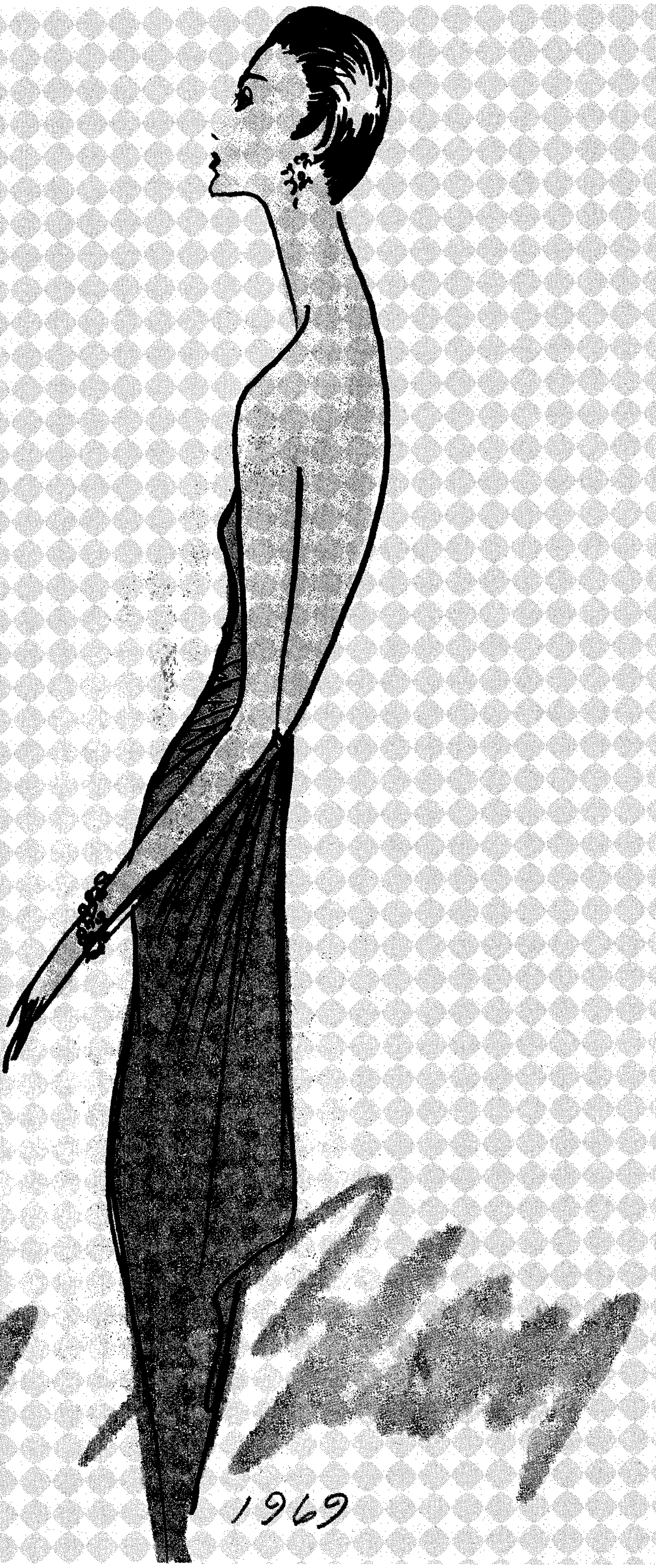
Having the confidence to mix things up is very American. Women like Millicent Rodgers and Babe Paley knew how to combine the best ingredients of the American sporty look with Paris couture. One woman who does this today is Chessy Rayner, who can go from wearing an evening dress by Mme. Grès—absolutely pure—to putting on a daytime jacket of mine over Banana Republic pants, with a Gap T-shirt underneath. A few years ago, I put a model in one of my shows



SKETCHES COURTESY OF BILL BLASS LTD. ARCHIVES

Far left: Cutaway jacket with striped morning pants, 1963. Left: Crêpe top and skirt with embroidered chain belt, 1989. Below: Felt hat, 1991. Right: Classic backless, strapless drape gown, 1969.





wearing a double-breasted camel-hair polo coat over a short evening dress.

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I was born in Fort Wayne, Indiana, in 1922, and my interest in making women look good had nothing to do with "fashion" and everything to do with getting out of Fort Wayne. During the Depression, when the whole country was poor, the allure of Hollywood films was enormous. I was bewitched by the nervy glamour of the life that you saw in the films of Carole Lombard, Kay Francis, and Constance Bennett. I was seven or eight when I did my first sketches; they envisioned women with cigarettes and cocktails on a penthouse terrace in New York.

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I first came to New York in 1939, the year of the World's Fair, and the city was the most extraordinary place to see wonderfully dressed women. In those days, the excitement of an expensive Broadway opening was rivalled by the free experience of walking up and down Fifth Avenue on Thursday nights, when the department stores unveiled their new windows. You started at Altman's, at Thirty-fourth Street, and walked to Bergdorf's, at Fifty-seventh, with a side trip over to Hattie Carnegie, on East Forty-ninth Street. The window designers vied with one another in originality and outrageousness. Bonwit Teller even used famous artists like Dali to decorate the windows. For someone like me, there couldn't have been a better education.

Everybody dressed up. Some women spent all day in fitting rooms; you put on clothes for lunch, clothes for cocktails, clothes for dinner, whereas today you go to work, lunch, and dinner in the same goddam black pants suit. The women who lunched at the Colony brought their dogs. The coat-check girl knew the name of every poodle and Yorkshire, and the dogs all got along fine—often better than the women did.

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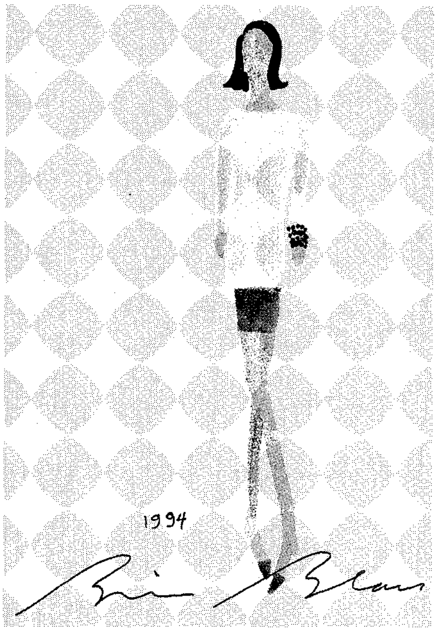
The best way to learn about designing is to see how people actually live. I had access to all sorts of extraordinary rooms after the war. Two of the most original hostesses were Kitty Miller and Diana Vreeland, whose houses had been done by Billy Baldwin—one very spare and clean, the other vibrant and over the top, both enormously appealing. That's when I first became aware of the connection between the rooms people live in and what they wear. An extreme example is Valentina Schlee, the Russian designer, whose clothes seemed created to go with her exotic apartment on East Fifty-second Street, overlooking the river.



Above: a "nothing" outfit, 1994. Right: Blass in his Seventh Avenue office, 1968.

PHOTO: ARTHUR TCHOLAKIAN, COURTESY OF BILL BLASS LTD. ARCHIVES

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After I started my own business, in the late sixties, I began taking my clothes on the road, all over America. Those trips taught me about what works and doesn't work in different parts of the country. Black, of course, was a New York invention. In the thirties and forties, the little black dress was an absolute uniform, just as it is today. It may have to do with the city's lack of class barriers or lack of natural color. But in bright, sunny cities like Houston and Los Angeles black looks terrible. In fact, outside Manhattan color is for the rich; that's why Chanel has always been so popular in America. I always say to women that when you're out at night and in a sea of men in dark suits wear red or white and you'll be noticed.

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Sportswear is an American invention—think of the Gibson girls in their shirtwaists. Some of the great stores used to be devoted entirely to sportswear: Peck & Peck, Abercrombie & Fitch. American women collect and keep their sportswear with the same enthusiasm that men do. What has remained a constant in all American clothes—whether they've reflected the casualness of the sixties, the international flair of the seventies, the showiness of the eighties, or the minimalism of the nineties—has been a certain nonchalance. There is a relaxed, unforced quality about the really well-dressed American woman. In a *Vogue* feature in 1950, eight American women of style were described as having "an air of assurance and an air of thrift. And this gives an air of luxury: there is a feeling that they have picked and discarded among the goods of the world as carefully as a canasta champion at play. The reassuring thing—and a pleasure—is that each one is entirely individual." Damned if I know, but I think we helped elevate the word "wearable" from being anti-fashion to being quite respectable.

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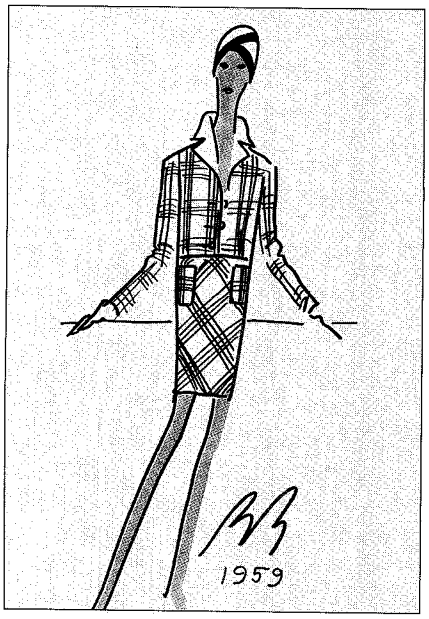
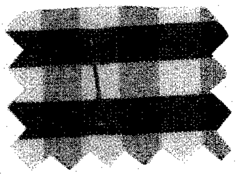
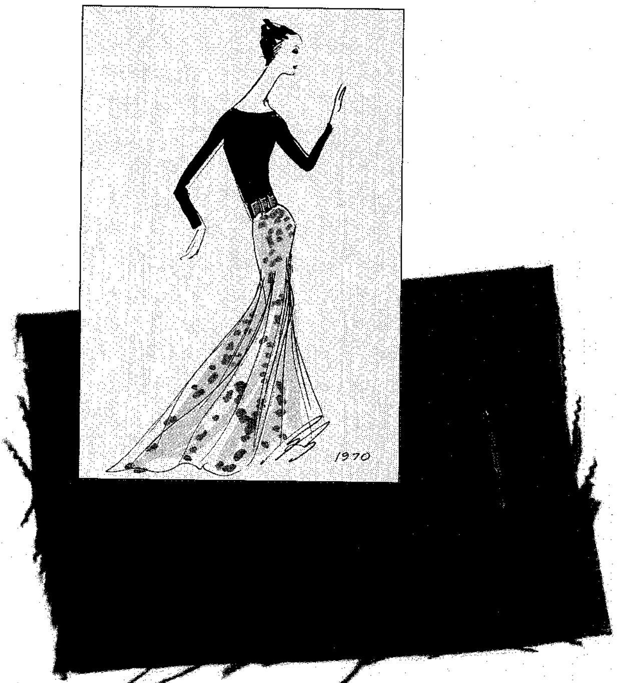
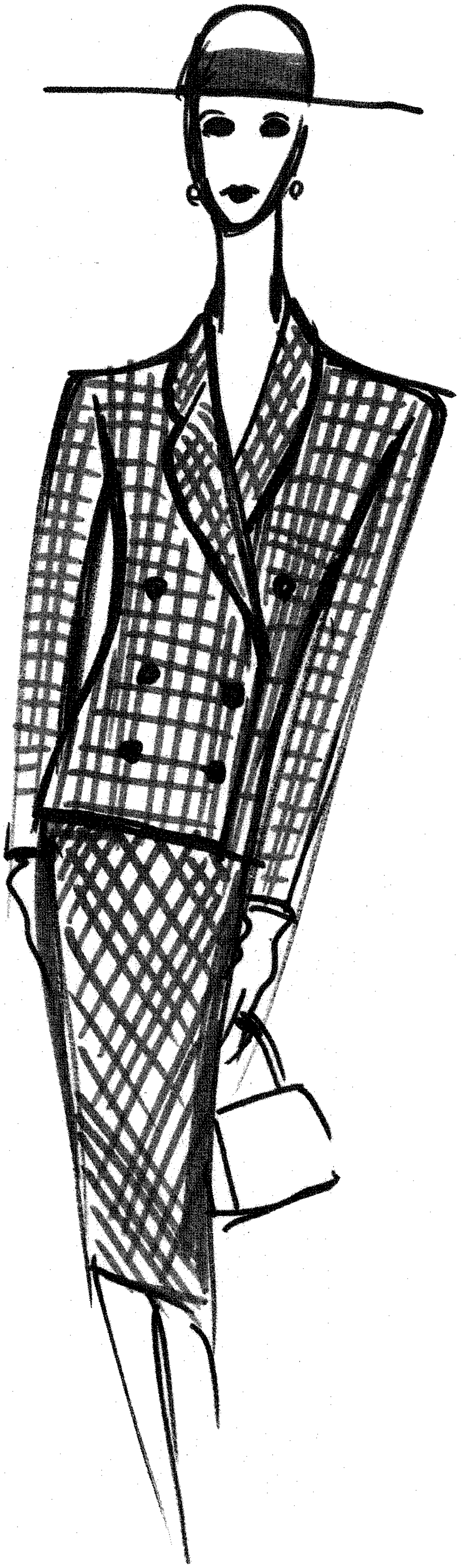
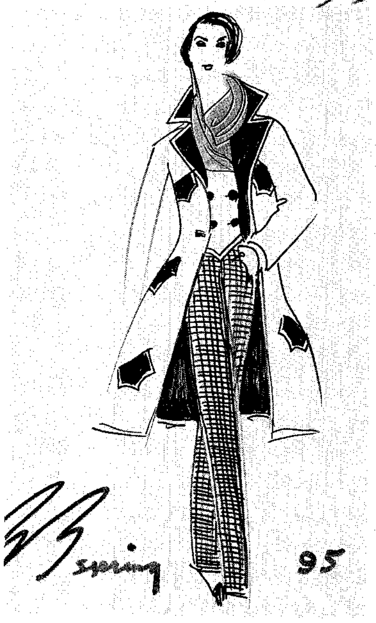
I've always been inclined to agree with the sentiment of a very clever book that became a best-seller at the end of the Depression, when most American women could barely afford lipstick. It was written by Elizabeth Hawes, the American clothes designer, and it was called "Fashion Is Spinach." The title, of course, was inspired by the Carl Rose cartoon in this magazine, which showed a little boy declaring to his mother, "I say it's spinach, and I say the hell with it." I have to agree. In a way, fashion *is* spinach, and I, too, say the hell with it. After all, nothing any fashion designer has ever done has come close to having the influence of blue-jeans. That Levi Strauss invention—one of the sexiest items a man or a woman can wear—is the most significant contribution America has made to fashion. And, after all, it's based on the most chic and least contrived American icon—the cowboy. ♦











Wool
Gabardine
skirt

Clockwise from left: Six-pocket coat, check pants, and faux vest, 1995. Black top with leopard chiffon skirt, 1970. Glen plaid sack dress, 1959. Check suit with single-notch lapel and bias skirt, 1983.

FICTION

HONEYMOON

A seventies wedding (all the guests have already slept with the bride).

BY KEVIN CANTY

THIS is 1974, October: Jane and I are drinking our way home, bar to bar, down the Blackfoot River. Leigh Vincent, who was once Jane's girlfriend and mine, too, has just married a knifemaker. The wedding was by Seeley Lake.

Evening sunlight, leaves skittery across the blacktop. Jane's driving. She says, "It's not that complicated."

"What?"

"We've been jilted," Jane says.

"We could have taken better care of her."

"She's a big girl," Jane says. "She can take care of herself."

A silence, in which we see an apparition of the bride, floating above the highway in her mother's lacy white dress and a pair of Red Wing logger boots. The knifemaker wore his best buckskin. It was sunny but cold. Her parents looked as though they had accidentally wandered into a nudist colony: trying not to stare at the small, dirty cabin he had built, deerskins tanning in the wedding yard.

The bride invited only people she had slept with.

"Bar," I tell Jane, and she steers the pickup into the parking lot. Every vehicle there is a four-wheel drive, and enormous. A dead deer stares at us from the bed of the truck next to ours.

"Somebody got lucky," Jane says.

"There are more deer in North America now than there were when Columbus landed," I announce, and Jane looks at me.

INSIDE are men in camouflage. It's loud and smoky. Jane orders whiskey to go with her beer. The men at a table in one corner are still in face paint, black and green.

"It smells in here," Jane says.

"It's this stuff. They wear it to disguise the human scent," I tell her. "It's supposed to smell like deer sex."

She downs the shot of bourbon in one take, and I admire the fine workings of her neck. Her blue work shirt is open two buttons. She's quite a beautiful girl, despite the crewcut and the total lack of availability. She's about an inch taller than I am, with long arms and fingers, Connecticut money.

"Diamond earrings," I say.

"It was her *wedding*," Jane says. "I'm supposed to be *her friend*."

"Or something."

"Don't get snippy." She runs her finger around the rim of the empty shot glass. "You're going to have to drive, I think."

A rumble of laughter from the end of the bar—three bearded faces look away when I look up, one holding my eyes.

"I don't mind driving," I tell her.

"Let's get something to go," she says.

"We could just head back."

"Not yet. I mean, if you really want to . . . "

"No." I don't want to be back just yet. I can tell that we both want something to happen. There's a silence between us—Jane, me, Leigh—like static on a long-distance call, needing the right words in order to disappear.

JANE buys a twelve-pack of Lucky Lager and a double bourbon in a plastic go cup. She's got a job on the railroad. I'm still in college, cleaning up married-student housing, living on peanut butter and Top Ramen. In the parking lot, the dead deer stares at us. Jane can't seem to take her eyes off it.

"You get a pleasure out of that," she says.

"I don't know."

We drive a couple of miles to a fishing-access area, and down onto a gravel road. Jane's thinking. "I can imagine pulling the trigger," she says. "That's not the problem. It's just that next thing, where you open them up, dump their guts out. Does that make sense to you?"

A breeze down the canyon blows the day right out of the air, and suddenly it's cold.

WE get out, climb up on the rocks, clutching cold beer cans in cold hands. She finished the whiskey on the ride down.

"I've never seen her look like that," Jane says.

"Look what I can do."

"That's right. Look how far I can go."

"And none of you can follow," I say. The river is rushing over rocks, that same busy, blank sound: static. The sunlight has passed out of the canyon, and the sky, through the trees overhead, is a delicate gray.

Jane takes another beer, hands me one, keeps her eyes to herself.

"I saw her like that once before," I tell Jane. "When I hitchhiked out to Iowa, last summer, they let me see her in the hospital."

"Don't pull rank on me," Jane says. "Your pain is worse than mine is, right?—no, that's not it. You've got a right to it. I'm just her fucking dyke girlfriend, but you."

"I didn't mean that."

"You didn't have to mean that. You didn't have to *do* anything to have a right to her. You've got all of nature on your side. Fuck, I'm drunk."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't fucking be sorry," Jane says, standing up, walking in a small tight circle. "Don't listen to me. I'm just so fucking sad."

There's nothing to say. She's paying no attention to me anyway. She's heard something else, and after a few seconds I hear it, too: a rustling in the dry leaves along the bank, snapping twigs and moving branches, and then I am standing, too, my beer spilling into the rocks and gravel, and I think, Night, cold, forest, and tighten my belly against the danger.

A small deer staggers out of the bushes, into the clearing along the bank, trailing a yellow arrow from its gut.

"Oh, Jesus," Jane says.

I back away. Wounded animals are dangerous. Blood runs down its hind leg onto the rock as it looks from one of us to the other, eyes dull.

"Jesus Christ," Jane says. She kneels in the gravel, to make herself smaller, and starts to crawl toward the tiny deer.

"What are you doing?" I ask her.

The deer edges away, suddenly bright-eyed, endangered.

"You're scaring it," I tell her.

"It's the smell," Jane says. "It won't come anywhere near us because of our smell. Don't let it get away."

Slowly she backs into the river, up to her thighs and then her waist, and then she dips into the water completely and disappears. Has the river carried her away? The deer and I watch, both wondering, as she emerges from the water and slowly, gently, edges up the bank toward the animal. It watches for as long as it can, then wheels and darts back into the bankside weeds.

"Get it," Jane says.

I start running. I have a heavy, jagged rock in my hand. Weed stems wrap themselves around my legs, and clouds of dry pollen explode in my face. The deer is nowhere. When I stop, though, I can hear it, twenty or thirty feet away, running. I run after it, but it quickly outdistances me. I stop again, and there is nothing: the silence of the river. There must be only ten more minutes of light. The air is luminous gray.

Jane is freezing when I get back, I can see it in her face. She hunches over herself, shivering.

"What were you trying to do?" she asks. I still have the rock in my hand.

I let it drop to the ground. "Nothing," I tell her.

"You were going to kill it."

"It was already dead, good as dead. With that arrow in its side."

"I know," she says. "I'm cold."

JANE has a sleeping bag in her truck, behind the seat, she tells me, next to the flares and the flashlight. "Hurry," she says. "I'm freezing."

It's dark. I don't know how dark it is until I open the door of the truck and the dome light goes on, and it's bright as a living room. I find the sleeping bag where she said it was, but when I step outside and close the door again I can't see a thing.

"Did you see a deer?" asks a man's voice, close up.

"Fuck," I say, and jump back. "I didn't know you were there."

It's the hunter, carrying his big machine of a bow. His face is camouflage. "I've been tracking it since two o'clock," he says.

"We saw it, but it's gone."

The hunter slumps against the steel back bumper of the truck. "I've been tracking that deer all day, my son and I. I thought he had a good clean shot."

"It's not your son's fault," I tell him.

"He gut-shot the fucking thing," the hunter says. "I'm sorry, but he was twenty feet away! Gut-shot it."

"I've got to go," I tell him, and walk back down to the river, the sleeping bag dragging like laundry behind me. *It's not your son's fault* rings in my ears. I hope Jane didn't hear me.

"I'm freezing," she says. "I've got to get out of these clothes."

"Just go up to the truck."

"I don't know," she says, and in the flashlight circle I can see that she's blue and shivering: night, cold, forest. "I'm O.K.," she says. "I'm just . . . "

The sleeping bag is the Boy Scout kind, big and square, with duck-print flannel inside. I zip it open, lay it on the ground, she strips at the edge of the flashlight beam and huddles into it. Her clothes lie in a cold wet puddle beside her head.

"I'm sorry," Jane says.

"No, you're right."

"I . . ."

"Don't worry about it."

"No, it's just, I don't know—me and me and me, you know? My suffering."

"Don't worry about it," I tell her, in my best John Wayne. I get up to where the twelve-pack is lying on its side in the sand. The beer is cold as the air, cold as the water.

"Could I have a sip of that, please?" Jane asks.

"Are you all right?"

"I'll be fine in a minute."

I sit in the sand again, lean my back against a damp log, the cold damp temperature of night. I take Jane's head onto my lap, feeling the cold stiff bristles of her crewcut, and bring the can to her lips as though she were an invalid.

"Another, please," Jane says, and I give her another. We finish the first one, and the second, and the third, and I can feel her trembling quieting down. I see the edge of the moon crawling into the canyon. She's fine. I'm fine. I'm still holding her head in my lap, her fine-boned head.

"Are you drunk?" she asks me, and I nod sure. "Are you too drunk to make the drive home?"

"I don't know. I hope I'm O.K."

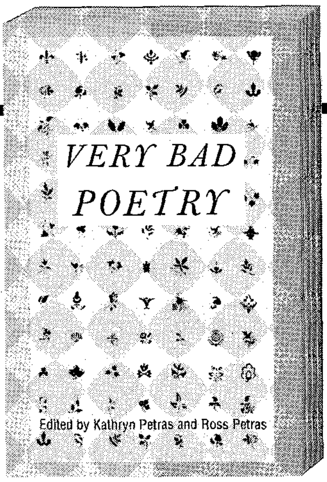
"You think I'm drunk enough to sleep with you?"

"I don't know," I say. "I don't think so."

"You think I'm lonely enough?"

I don't say anything. I hear the sounds of the river and the wind in the trees. She leans her head against my chest and stares up into the sky.

"Orion," she says. ◆



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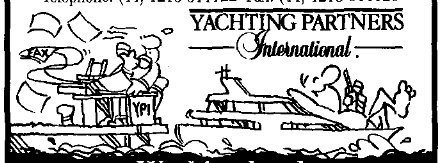

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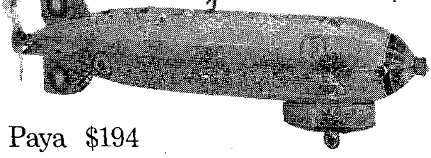

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BOOKS

WINE, WOMEN, AND JOHN

Michael Holroyd takes a second look at Augustus John.

BY VICTORIA GLENDINNING

BETWEEN the two World Wars, Augustus John was the most famous living British artist. He had, to say the least, panache, and, according to his biographer, Michael Holroyd, he came to represent "the Great Artist, the Great Lover and the Great Bohemian" in the public imagination. Holroyd also suggests that these characterizations were full of painful ironies. Augustus John's most lasting work of art turned out to be himself, which perhaps helps to explain why Holroyd has returned to revise his earlier biography of the painter, more than two decades after its original publication. Some three hundred letters written by Augustus John have come to light since then, and a great deal more has become known about his sister, Gwen, so Holroyd decided to buy back the rights and take a second look. At the head of his preface to "Augustus John: The New Biography" (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $40) he sets a quotation from Tom Stoppard: "If an idea's worth having once, it's worth having twice." But a good idea, like a love affair, is never quite the same the second time around.

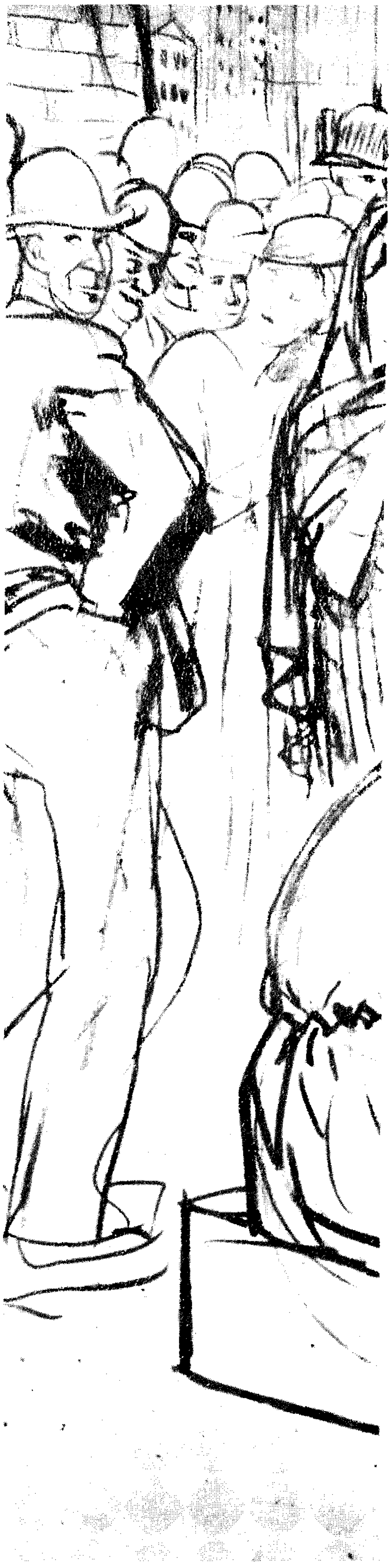
John's extravagant public persona represented a deliberate rejection of his origins. He was born in Wales in 1878, into a family of formidable small-town respectability. His mother died when he was six. His father was rigidly unloving, and his aunts were rigidly religious. A blow in childhood left him partly deaf. He was a bored, melancholy boy seething with violence and revolt—with a "drive," Holroyd says, "to be someone else." As an art student at the Slade at the turn of the century, he effectively did become someone else. He transformed his appearance, and turned moody, romantic, and reckless. Already, Holroyd writes, "the Augustus John legend was beginning."

The Slade taught draftsmanship above all, and John's great talent was for line drawing; his color and brushwork were less successful. But this flamboyant young artist had no trouble finding supporters and patrons. When, after winning awards, he began to show his work, the art critic Roger Fry championed it, and John was drawn into English art politics on the "alternative," anti-Royal Academy wing.

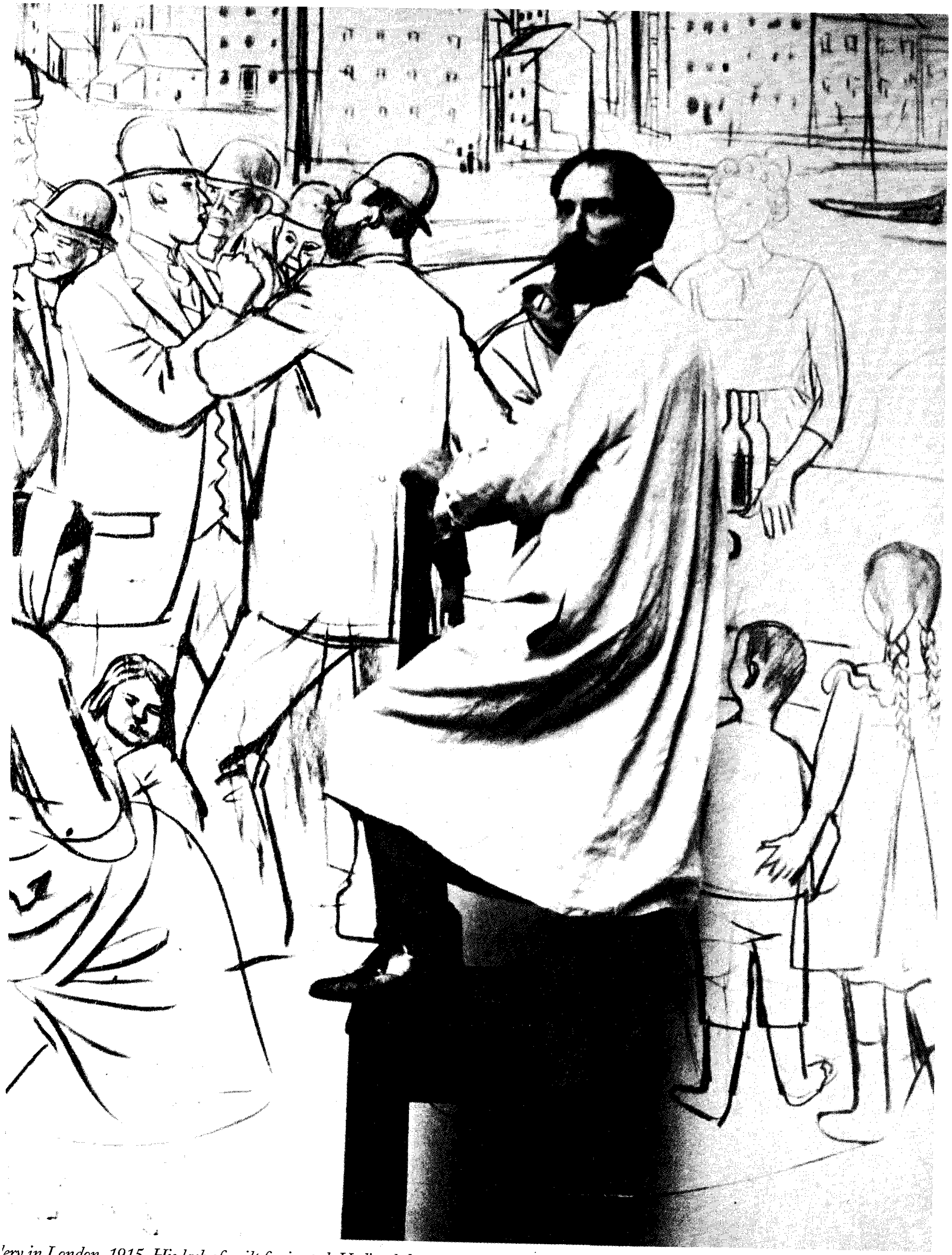
His private life was becoming alternative in parallel. He had discovered sex, and from then on he hated to be without a woman, or three. "Perhaps because of the emotional deprivation of his mother, Augustus seemed to be missing a source of self-esteem," Holroyd writes. "He was like a leaking vessel that needed continual attention." He married Ida Nettleship, a gifted fellow-student, and played truant right from the start, absenting himself from the party given to celebrate their wedding. After six years of marriage, he was still in his twenties and had seven children, five of them Ida's and two of them born to Dorelia McNeill, a beautiful, almost silent young woman who modelled for John and lived with the married pair—or, often, with just Ida and the children, when John was off after someone else.

Dorelia's serene and passive presence—in his life as in his paintings—became a necessity to John. The most painful pages in this book reveal poor Ida's gallant struggles not merely to accept the ménage à trois but to love Dorelia as much as John did and to welcome the arrangement as ideal for them all. Ida and Dorelia treated John as an extra child who had to be managed and indulged.

John needed his lovers, patrons, and friends to be "like some fire brigade, in permanent readiness for his calls," Holroyd notes. Without an audience, the painter ceased to exist. He needed the repeated stimulus of new sexual encounters. He had the seemingly statutory love affair with Lady Ottoline Morrell. Men as well as women fell under his spell—especially chairbound, deskbound men,



John, photographed at the C



'ery in London, 1915. His lack of guilt fascinated. He lived the way many people thought they would like to live, if they dared.

who lived vicariously through him. His lack of guilt fascinated them. He lived the way many people thought they would like to live, if they dared. He encouraged this hero worship and then punished it, just as he accepted the financial support of patrons, such as the New York lawyer John Quinn and the collector Hugh Lane, and then bitterly resented the obligations he incurred. He behaved badly.

John also needed new enthusiasms to fuel his imagination. In Liverpool, where he taught in the art school, he met the Romany scholar John Sampson in 1901 and became infatuated not only with Romany lore and language but with the Romany way of life. Tents, wagons, painted carts, horses, campfires, ragged girls—they all became staples of his fantasy and his art. To him, the Gypsies were primitives, or "the supreme anti-capitalists," as Holroyd puts it, in the idiom of the early nineteen-seventies.

In 1903, when John was in his mid-twenties, he became a member of the New English Art Club, which had been set up in opposition to the art establishment that showed at the Royal Academy. During the same period, the Chelsea Art School was inaugurated, with Augustus John and the painter William Orpen as joint principals, but being a school principal was not a position that the former took seriously for very long. Meanwhile, he was showing at all the fashionable galleries—Carfax, Goupil, Chenil—and in group shows of almost any kind. His interest in showing was financial. He had a lot of mouths to feed.

When Ida died, in 1907, after the birth of their fifth child, John predictably got drunk, and did not attend the cremation. From then on, Dorelia administered the ever-growing tribe of children, cast-off models, and cast-off mistresses, in France, in London, and in graceful, untidy English manor houses. She influenced the appearance of a whole generation of female art students with her trailing French peasant dresses.

HOLROYD'S first account of John's life was a good one, and the "new" biography, augmented by Holroyd's recent excavations, is an impressive piece of work in its own right. Its author is the godfather of modern non-academic British biography: Holroyd was the first to show how rigorous scholarship can serve a dramatic narrative without smothering it, and his unhysterical candor about sexual unorthodoxy liberated biography from what had previously been seen as an honorable discretion. He also has the gift of making even the walk-on parts in a story come alive by means of spare, spiky phrases; in this book, for example, Max Beerbohm has an "immaculately tailored human nature," and Augustus John's mother-in-law keeps all her grievances "brightly intact" for decades.

But Holroyd's first biography of John was the perfect book to be writing, and reading, in the nineteen-seventies. Augustus John had long hair and a beard. He wore a gold earring, a wide-brimmed hat, and stagily bohemian clothes. In the nineteen-seventies, his carryings on seemed only what was expected of an artist, and they reflected and validated popular culture in Britain. Young men—and some middle-aged ones—were wearing their hair down to their shoulders, like John. Young women—and some middle-aged ones—floated around barefoot in flowing robes, like Dorelia. Beards proliferated. In that dope-enhanced, post-Pill, pre-AIDS interlude, all you needed was love, as the Beatles put it. Augustus John, even in his drunken, goatish maturity, seemed to the original readers of this biography (including me) a pioneer dropout seeking an alternative life style—a hippie of a familiar kind, perpetually on the road or on the prowl or on the bottle. The only surprise was that a career like John's could have been successfully sustained in ultra-respectable Edwardian England.

A biographer's prime purpose, Holroyd writes in the preface to his current book, "is to re-create a world into which readers may enter, and where, interpreting messages from the past, they may experience feelings and thoughts that remain with them after the book is closed." Messages from the past, however, are read differently by different generations. The "feelings and thoughts that remain" with us change with society's perspectives. This book reads very differently in the nineteen-nineties, and not primarily because of the cuts and additions.

We have become infinitely less good-humored, infinitely more judgmental. We disapprove of certain behaviors and attitudes even more vehemently than our Edwardian forebears did. The women's movement, AIDS, an obsessional concern with healthy living, and a public distaste for damaging self-indulgence have all played their part. Holroyd explains that he has cast his narrative as comedy—"romantic comedy, domestic comedy, the comedy of morals and of manners, absurdist comedy, black comedy, tragicomedy." But getting paralytically drunk on a regular basis, pouncing on any fanciable female, and fathering babies all over the place no longer seem the stuff even of tragicomedy. Worse still, Augustus John seems a public nuisance and a bore, who would nowadays be up against a non-stop barrage of sexual-harassment charges. (I would not go so far as to say that no modern woman would put up with him. Handsome, highly sexed public figures don't have a great deal of trouble finding casual partners and masochistically devoted spouses, even now.)

From this distance, there seems nothing really radical or revolutionary about the aesthetic of Augustus John and his entourage. He was always basically a nineteenth-century painter in his approach and in his subject matter—rustic scenes and figures in landscape, conveyed with "realism." He was never a convinced member of any ideological or artistic movement. Nor, in England, was there any ideological or artistic movement worth adhering to. Mary Taubman, the leading authority on Gwen John, has rightly referred to "the curiously vapid atmosphere of the English art world" in the first decade of the twentieth century. Most of Augustus John's mentors, contemporaries, and competitors are not so much forgotten as rapidly passed over in the annals of British art history. This dim and arid insularity was finally exploded by the London exhibition "Manet and the Post-Impressionists," in 1910.

The impact of modern European art on English conservatism was huge. That 1910 show gave the British public its first look at van Gogh, Gauguin, and Cézanne, and it marked the beginning of the end for John, though no one yet knew it. In the same year, America was just discovering him. In New York's famous Armory Show of 1913, his work was heavily represented, and his flamboyant personality and sexual reputation certainly didn't harm his sales on either side of the Atlantic. But in the artistic community he could no longer be seriously considered a member of the avant-garde. He had become increasingly reactionary, turning on his former supporter Roger Fry, and, in so doing, foretelling, not inaccurately, the future of British art and art criticism: "If you sent [Fry] a gilded turd in a glass case he would probably discover some strange poignant rhythm in it and hail you as a cataclysmic genius."

Holroyd believes that John failed to develop as an artist because there was nothing very interesting going on in his head. The London *Times* critic wrote in 1938, about his show at Tooth's, "As everybody knows there is a kind of industry which is really a shirking of mental effort." Yet he remained a famous man in his own country—a fabled figure to be glimpsed stalking the streets of Soho, Fitzrovia, and Chelsea. He drank more and more, and pounced on women (including the fiancée of one of his sons) more and more compulsively. The number of children he sired has never been precisely calculated. He was not a good father: at home with the tribe, he was pedantic, critical, punitive, gloomy. The children dreaded his returns.

In his late years, John painted celebrity portraits that often turned out badly or were never finished. "Who is this chap?" asked General Montgomery, who sat for him in 1944. "He drinks, he's dirty, and I know there are women in the background!" It became impossible to separate John's work from his personality and his public image. His notoriety expanded as his loneliness and professional isolation deepened. Although aging Americans continued to collect his pictures, after he died his reputation as an artist went into further decline, and it has never recovered. It is his sister, Gwen—whose work, to his credit, he always admired and supported—who has emerged from the shadows as the more interesting artist.

The old satyr's last years were pitiful. One sixteen-year-old who sat for him in the nude later remembered him "being so

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old, the coarse beard, smell of whisky and tobacco, no words, just grunting and snorting." He made her pregnant. Dorelia came to her aid. A daughter was born, and was named Zoë. In 1961, the year John died, Zoë—now a grown woman—was staying at Fryern Court, the last home of Dorelia and her entourage. The old man was sleeping downstairs. Panting and gasping, he found his way up to Zoë's bed and lay down beside her. She put her arms around him, to calm him:

"Can't seem to do it now," he apologized. "I don't know." After a little time she took him down, tucked him up, and returned to her room. It was probably his last midnight expedition.

If this evenhanded account of John's life is emblematic of the era in which it was first published, it also transcends the knee-jerk judgments of the nineties: in the end, it seems to me, the informed compassion of Michael Holroyd still has something important to teach about frailty, grace, and love. Augustus John's achievement, with the perspective of time, seems increasingly questionable. But failure, when it is humanely investigated, may be more instructive than success. ♦

EAT, DRINK, AND BE WARY

Face to face with the strange new contagion.

BY OLIVER SACKS

Richard Rhodes

CREUTZFELDT-JAKOB disease is a rare disease—its incidence is about one in a million per year—and I have seen it only twice in my life: more than a third of a century ago, when I was a neurology resident; and (as it happens), for the second time, this winter, in a patient of mine in New York. In 1964, the unfortunate man afflicted with it was presented as a case of an unusual degenerative brain disease of a sort very occasionally seen in older patients. There was discussion of its typical features: a rapidly advancing dementia, becoming profound within weeks; sudden, lightning "myoclonic" jerks of the muscles; and a peculiar-looking, "periodic" electroencephalogram. These, we were told, constituted the "diagnostic triad" for C.J.D. Only about twenty cases had been reported since the original accounts of it, by Creutzfeldt and Jakob, half a century before, and we were excited at encountering such a neurological rarity. At that time, neurology was still largely descriptive, almost ornithological, and C.J.D. was seen as a rara avis, along with Hallervorden-Spatz disease, Unverricht-Lundborg syndrome, and other such exotic, eponymous rarities.

We had no idea in 1964 of the truly singular nature of C.J.D., its affinities with other human and animal diseases, or that it would turn out to be the archetype, the epitome, of a whole new order of disease. We never for a moment thought of it as infectious; indeed, we took blood and spinal fluid from this patient nonchalantly, as from any other, not dreaming that an inadvertent needle-stick, the accidental implanting of a grain of tissue, might cause us to share his fate. It was only in 1968 that C.J.D. was shown to be a transmissible disease.

IN 1957, Carleton Gajdusek, a young American physician and ethologist of extraordinary brilliance, who had already done notable work exploring disease "isolates" elsewhere in the world, went to New Guinea to investigate a mysterious neurological disease decimating the villages of the Fore people. It seemed to affect women and children almost exclusively, and it apparently had never occurred before the present century. The Fore called it "kuru," and ascribed it to sorcery. The clinical course of kuru was one of rapid and remorseless neurological deterioration—falling, staggering, paralyses, and involuntary laughter—ending fatally within a few months. The brains of those who died showed devastating changes, some areas having been reduced to a virtual sponge, riddled with holes. The cause of this disease was exceedingly puzzling—genetic factors, toxic factors, disease agents of the usual sort were all considered and found irrelevant. It required original work, much of it in the difficult field conditions of western New Guinea, to trace the disease to the transmission of a "new" kind of agent, one which could rest for years in the tissues of those affected without causing any symptoms, and then, after this huge latent period, begin a rapidly fatal process. Gajdusek used the term "slow virus" for this singular agent, and demonstrated that it was cannibalism—specifically, the eating of brains—that caused its spread among the Fore, and that the agent could cause a similar disease when it was given to chimps and monkeys. For this work he received a Nobel Prize in 1976.

Richard Rhodes begins his "Deadly Feasts" (Simon & Schuster; $24) with the kuru story, and he tells it with the technical mastery, the psychological insight, and the dramatic force we have come to expect from him since his powerful books on the making of the atomic and hydrogen bombs. Indeed, there is a special immediacy here, for Rhodes went to New Guinea and met one of these now rare patients with kuru, and, through long interviews with Gajdusek and many of the other scientists involved, he has virtually relived the early days of this investigation—a time of fear, bewilderment, great ambition, and intellectual discovery.

From its prelude in New Guinea, Rhodes's chronicle opens out, steadily, to wider and wider prospects, showing how connections with other human diseases and with various animal diseases were laboriously—and sometimes serendipitously—pieced together. Not the least of the book's many excellences is showing the great role that chance and luck and unexpected encounters play in the all too human business of science. A most crucial serendipity came in 1959, when an English veterinarian, William Hadlow, saw an exhibit of photographs—Gajdusek's "kuru show"—then on display in the Wellcome Medical Museum, in London. Hadlow was instantly struck by the similarities of the clinical and pathological picture of kuru to that of a fatal sheep disease, scrapie, which had affected isolated flocks of sheep in England and elsewhere since the early eighteenth century. (It had been endemic in Central Europe before that, and spread to the United States in 1947.) And scrapie, as Hadlow pointed out in a letter to *The Lancet*, was known to be transmissible. Gajdusek had thought about an infectious basis for kuru briefly, but had then discarded the notion; now he was forced into reconsidering it—indeed, into seeing that kuru *must* be infectious, and that any similar human diseases would almost certainly be infectious, too. Demonstrating this experimentally took years of patient and difficult work, which involved injecting chimps with kuru and C.J.D. tissue—work that was made more difficult by the long incubation periods of these diseases.

All these diseases—kuru, C.J.D., scrapie, and various rarer ones, like fatal familial insomnia and Gerstmann-Sträussler syndrome—are relentlessly progressive and rapidly fatal. All produce devastating spongy changes and cavitations in the brain—hence they are referred to collectively as the transmissible spongiform encephalopathies, or T.S.E.s. The disease agents in each of these are very difficult to isolate, smaller than viruses, and, ominously, capable of surviving the most drastic conditions (including extreme heat and pressure, as well as chemicals like formaldehyde and all the usual sterilization procedures).

Bacteria are autonomous and multiply by themselves; viruses use their genetic material to subvert the host's cells to replicate; but the T.S.E. disease agents show no evidence of containing any RNA or DNA at all. How, then, should they be characterized, and how can they cause disease? Gajdusek named these agents "infectious amyloids," although they are more commonly referred to now as "prions," the name given them by another major researcher, Stanley Prusiner. But if prions cannot replicate like viruses, how do they multiply and spread? Gajdusek had to envisage a wholly new form of disease process—one akin not to biological replication but to physicochemical crystallization, whereby the tiny prions, which are actually deviant, pleated forms of a normally present brain protein, act as "pattern-setting nucleants," or centers of re-crystallization, causing rapidly spreading transformations of the surrounding crystalline proteins. Such nucleation is seen in the patterning of ice or snowflakes, and an apocalyptic form of this was imagined years ago by Kurt Vonnegut in "Cat's Cradle," where the world is ended by a sliver of a substance that transforms all water into unmeltable "ice-nine." Prions were seen first as "slow" viruses, then as "unconventional" ones, but if we categorize them as "viruses" or "alive" we must radically redefine what we mean by either term, for they seem to belong, in many ways, to a purely crystalline world. (Gajdusek, indeed, entitled one of his early papers "Fantasy of a 'Virus' from the Inorganic World.")

Prions infect us not by lodging in us as invaders but by evoking a disturbance in our own brain proteins. It is for this reason that there is no inflammation or immune reaction to the prions, for our own protein, normal or abnormal, is not perceived by the immune system as foreign. It is the helplessness of the organism in the face of its own subversion, allied to the near-indestructibility of prions, which make the T.S.E.s potentially the deadliest diseases on earth. While the T.S.E.s may be extremely rare in nature, arising only from a very occasional, stochastic transformation of brain protein (this seems to account for the remarkably constant one-in-a-million incidence of sporadic C.J.D. throughout the world each year), cultural practices—eating brains or feeding offal to cattle—may radically alter the picture, and cause a galloping transmission of these diseases of a sort that never occurs in nature.

RHODES relates all this with a wealth of detail—he has read all the relevant literature and interviewed all the major players—and with a chilling, chapter-by-chapter logic occasionally reminiscent of "The Andromeda Strain." A central figure in the story, for the last forty years, has been that of Gajdusek; and though others often thought in the early days that kuru was no more than, as Rhodes puts it, "a tragic curiosity," confined to a few stone-age cannibals at the other end of the earth, Gajdusek insisted from the first on its much wider potential relevance. It was Gajdusek and colleagues of

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his at the National Institutes of Health who showed, in 1968, that C.J.D. was a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy, like kuru, and who warned that this disease might be transmitted accidentally by surgical or dental procedures. Exactly this happened in the early seventies, following corneal transplantation in one patient, and neurosurgery (with autoclaved but still infected instruments) in others.

A greatly heightened incidence of disease has been seen recently in patients given human-growth hormone (extracted from cadaveric pituitary glands) as children: of some eleven thousand six hundred patients given it, eighty-six so far have developed C.J.D. Fortunately, synthetic growth hormone became available in the mid-eighties, and forestalled further disasters.

Around this time, too, a new disease appeared among some cattle herds in Britain, causing them to act strangely, stagger, and rapidly die. It was dubbed, popularly, "mad-cow disease"; scientists referred to it as bovine spongiform encephalopathy, or B.S.E. Cattle, of course, are vegetarians, but in recent decades they have been fed increasingly on high-protein meat-and-bone meal, a slaughterhouse by-product containing, among other things, diseased cattle and sheep offal—perhaps including brain tissue from scrapie-infested sheep. Whether the cannibalistic eating of cattle brains amplified a previously rare and sporadic disease (like the cannibalism among the Fore) or whether scrapie prions from sheep crossed the species barrier to infect cattle is unclear. But the use of meat-and-bone meal soon brought about a disaster of vast proportions. So far, a hundred and sixty-six thousand cattle have died of B.S.E., and no European country will now accept British beef.

It was Gajdusek again who warned in the mid-eighties that there might be a further species jump, into human eaters of infected beef. We should watch out, he thought—though it might take a decade to become apparent—for an increase in the incidence of C.J.D., or new variants of it, perhaps affecting young people. And now this, too, has come about. More than a dozen young people have died of a C.J.D. variant in Britain in the last two years, and it is extremely likely that they acquired their disease from eating infected meat products. The clinical picture in these recent cases—early behavioral changes and incoördination—is more reminiscent of kuru than of "classical" C.J.D. (and this is true of the pathological changes, too).

THE British disaster has certainly been aided by ingenuousness or disingenuousness at every level—from the manufacturers of animal feed to the farmers and the butchers to the government agencies that issue substanceless denials or reassurances—and it is this atmosphere of prevarication that has provoked such a furor in Europe.

There has, by contrast, been a certain insularity here in the United States, a feeling that "it can't happen here." And yet we, too, have reason to be anxious, or at least highly concerned, for although there have not yet been any confirmed cases of B.S.E. here (testing has not been particularly thorough), there are large reservoirs of T.S.E. in sheep and mink, as well as in some wild deer and elk, and continuing use of meat-and-bone meal in the feeding of pigs, chickens, and cattle. And it may be, as Gajdusek theorizes, that no source of food can be considered safe from infection by prionlike agents. Meat-and-bone meal and animal by-products are used to fertilize even organic vegetable crops, and animal fat and gelatine are widely used in food, cosmetics, and pharmaceuticals.

Early this year, the F.D.A. proposed banning the feeding of ruminant protein to ruminants, but unless such a ban is rigorously enforced, without compromise, it will be of little use. The international science journal *Nature*, in its March 13, 1997, issue, comments that even now, a year after the demonstration of a probable link between B.S.E. and C.J.D., there is still a gross underestimation of the incidence of B.S.E., and continued contamination of cattle feed with ruminant protein in Britain.

THE patient I saw recently in New York was an eighty-seven-year-old woman who had been physically active, intellectually intact, and seemingly in good health until the beginning of 1997. In the last days of January, however, she became strangely excited, then agitated—"Something terrible is happening to me," she said. It was difficult for her to sleep: the curtains, the corners of the room seemed peopled by ghostly faces, and what sleep she had was broken by vivid dreams. On the fifth day, periods of confusion and disorientation began to appear. A medical disturbance was first suspected—a urinary infection, a chest infection, some toxic or metabolic disturbance—but none was found. Her attending physician could find no fever, nor any abnormality in the blood or urine. CAT scans of the brain, at this point, appeared normal. A psychiatric opinion was sought—depression in the elderly can sometimes present itself as confusion—but this notion became increasingly untenable as, within days, the initial confusion deepened.

In the middle of February, myoclonic jerks of the muscles convulsed her limbs, her abdomen, and her face. Her speech lost coherence and intelligibility from day to day, and an increasing spasticity took hold. By the third week of her illness, she no longer recognized her own children.

Toward the end of the month, she started to alternate between states of stuporlike sleep and a restless, twitching delirium, in which a light touch might bring on violent jerks of her whole body. She died on March 11th, emaciated, rigid, in coma, less than six weeks after the onset of her first symptoms. We are still awaiting tissue confirmation of the diagnosis, but the overwhelming possibility is that she had C.J.D. The pathologist, indeed, was visibly uneasy; no pathologist now is quite comfortable dealing with the tissues of such patients.

Neurologists see incorrigible diseases all the time, and yet this case threw me to an unusual degree, with its devastating clinical course, the almost visible day-to-day destruction of the brain, the racking myoclonic spasms of the body, and our manifest inability to do anything for the patient.

PREDICTIONS are impossible to make at this time—there are too many variables: the relative density, or permeability, of the species barrier between man and cattle, the role of genetic factors, and critical questions of dose and absorption (it is possible that relatively large amounts of infected meat products may need to be eaten, as opposed to the minute amounts of tissue which can transmit the disease if implanted or injected). And the incubation period of these diseases can be enormously long: there are Fore people coming down with kuru even now, forty years after they abandoned cannibalism.

Could C.J.D.—or C.J.D.-like diseases—become (in the words of Rhodes's subtitle) "a terrifying new plague," or are such fears exaggerated and hyperbolic? There have, so far, been seventeen confirmed cases—sixteen in England, one in France—of new-variant C.J.D., most of whom were young adults. These people, it is conjectured, contracted the disease in the mid-eighties, when there were no controls on animal feed. How many more people already carry the infectious agent, are waiting, as it were, to come down with fatal illness? Current projections range over several orders of magnitude, from a few dozen people to twenty thousand or more.

How seriously need we, as individuals, concern ourselves? This is very much a matter for the individual to decide, but I have many friends and colleagues in England, not particularly given to fads and overreactions, who have given up eating beef. They miss it, they used to enjoy it, they hope they can eat it again; but for the moment, given the present doubts, they think it unwise.

There have been, of course, end-of-the-world scenarios in every generation; some of these have had no support in reality, but others have. The Black Death killed a third of Europe's population, and it was wondered at one point whether it might not spell the end of humanity. In the last months of 1918, when a flu of unprecedented virulence—the "Spanish" flu—infected a billion people and killed twenty-five million, it was wondered, too, whether the entire species might not be at risk. Rhodes is clearly drawn to fearful, even apocalyptic scenarios, whether of nuclear holocaust or widespread fatal disease, and an apocalyptic note sounds, very occasionally, in "Deadly Feasts."

But the story he so brilliantly synthesizes and relates is, in itself, dramatic in the extreme; and for the most part he takes consistent care in the balancing and presenting of data, and maintains a dispassionate and even tone. My patient was elderly, and her C.J.D.—if it was C.J.D.—may well have been a one-in-a-million sporadic case. But the question, or vision, that Richard Rhodes poses—the spectre of widespread human spongiform encephalopathies being transmitted to us from beef and perhaps other animal products—calls for serious reflection and decision at every level. "Deadly Feasts" is a book to be read and pondered carefully—and perhaps acted on—possibly before eating one's next hamburger. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

HALLUCINATING FOUCAULT, by Patricia Duncker (Ecco; $21). A mild Cambridge student falls in love with a brilliant young woman so ferocious that everyone is afraid of her: when she commands him to rescue the literary superstar who is the subject of his thesis from an asylum for the dangerously insane, obedience seems the less threatening option. Luxury, surprise, and seductions intellectual and otherwise figure in this compact, piquant first novel.

HUNGRY GHOSTS, by Jasper Becker (Free Press; $25). "Practical success in agriculture is the ultimate criterion of truth." This pronouncement was made by Stalin, whose agricultural policies in the Ukraine in the early nineteen-thirties led to a famine that killed millions. But Mao Zedong was to outstrip his Soviet rival between the years 1958 and 1961, when more than thirty million Chinese peasants died of starvation. Their deaths were in every sense needless—the consequence of unimaginably foolish and brutal agricultural policies—and they are a reminder, as the economist Amartya Sen writes, that "famines are caused by censorship and are the result of political decisions." This is a horrifying, necessary book.

IN THE COUNTRY OF COUNTRY, by Nicholas Dawidoff (Pantheon; $25). Dawidoff is a dyed-in-the-wool Yankee, but he has done his best to overcome that in his fine portrait of country musicians and the places that spawned them: Boiling Spring, North Carolina, a bump in the road that produced Earl Scruggs, whose Paganini-like virtuosity elevated the banjo beyond comedy; Dyess, Arkansas, where J. R. Cash's beloved older brother was torn open by a table saw; Winchester, Virginia, where a big-boned girl named Patsy drank with the boys and put the torch to hillbilly singing. Dawidoff is affectionate but unflinching (George Jones comes across as infatuated with lawn care and hair products), and his withering critiques of contemporary Nashville should be required reading on Music Row.

BLUE WINDOWS: A CHRISTIAN SCIENCE CHILDHOOD, by Barbara Wilson (Picador; $25). In a memoir of exceptional sensitivity and intelligence, Wilson explores the unrealistic theology that shaped her early life both before and after her mother, upon discovering that she had breast cancer, lost her mind. Wilson also examines Christian Science's debt to Transcendentalism, its relation to today's New Age movements, and its historic importance as a religion in which women have always possessed authority.

WITH A MOON IN TRANSIT, by Jacqueline Osherow (Grove; $18). In Osherow's third collection of poetry, formal verse and conversational diction combine seamlessly once more, but the poet's recent years in Salt Lake City seem to have changed her sense of landscape and distance: now the moon, the weather, and the "endless sage/ That goes silver at the slightest provocation" imbue many of the poems with a newfound naturalism. This is a poetry of gravity, rooted in place as it deftly explores the various selves we call our own.

THE THEATRE

HUSBANDS AND WIVES

A triumphant "Doll's House," and "The Young Man From Atlanta."

BY JOHN LAHR

SOMETIMES an audience strikes it rich. When Janet McTeer, who plays Nora Helmer in an imported West End version of Henrik Ibsen's "A Doll's House" (at the Belasco for a limited engagement), comes out of the Norwegian cold into the warmth of her pine-panelled living room, it takes us only a split second to know that we are in the company of masters. Ibsen, who by the end of the play will sound one of the first trumpet calls against patriarchy and against fustian Victorian dramaturgy, introduces his heroine, whom her husband, Torvald, infantilizes as his "skylark" and his "squirrel," in full, darting playfulness. Nora is a hubbub of Christmas preparation, and McTeer, who is a strapping, big-boned woman with a large sense of humor, swoops around the room like the woman-child Nora is—giggling, talking to herself, letting her tongue play across her lips, hiding the macaroons that are forbidden by Torvald under the piano lid. When Torvald (the passionate Owen Teale) emerges from his study—he has just been made manager of the Savings Bank after years of struggle—he is dressed in a severe black frock coat, but his delight in Nora is transparent. He scolds her for being a spendthrift, then hides extra money for her to find. He can't be angry with her for long or keep his hands off the body she is in the kittenish habit of rubbing against him. "Aren't I good to give in to you?" she later asks Torvald, who replies, "Good—because you give in to your husband? You funny little thing." Anthony Page's scrupulous, sensitive direction catches all the music and the irony in this collusion. By making Torvald a full-blooded, decent, but blinkered executive and not a hectoring Victorian prig, he frees "A Doll's House" from being a mere feminist tract and makes the tragedy of Torvald's unconsciousness all the more heartbreaking. He is as much a victim of the era's sexual politics as Nora is; he is losing the object of his desire even while he thinks he's properly serving it.

Nora is rudderless, and her speech—a curious gush of tact and tactlessness—is a barometer of her lack of ballast. One minute, she is gleefully and insensitively explaining to her impoverished widowed friend Kristine Linde (Jan Maxwell) that she and Torvald will have "more than basics, pots and *pots* of money." The next, she is generously finagling a job for Mrs. Linde at the bank—an appointment that unseats Nils Krogstad, a clerk from whom Nora once borrowed money that saved the overworked Torvald's life by allowing him a year to recuperate in Italy with the family. The dark side of Nora's appealing impetuosity is recklessness: to get the money, she forged her father's name on the loan papers. Now Krogstad (chillingly played by Peter Gowen), with his job in jeopardy, threatens to make the fraud known to Torvald by letter unless his position is secured. "I did it for love," Nora naïvely explains to Krogstad, whose blackmail is the first hard lesson of her adult life. Up to now, she has never had to take responsibility for anything. "Woman is judged by masculine law, as though she weren't a woman but a man," Ibsen wrote in his notes; and Krogstad reminds Nora that what she views as an act of love will be judged as fraud.

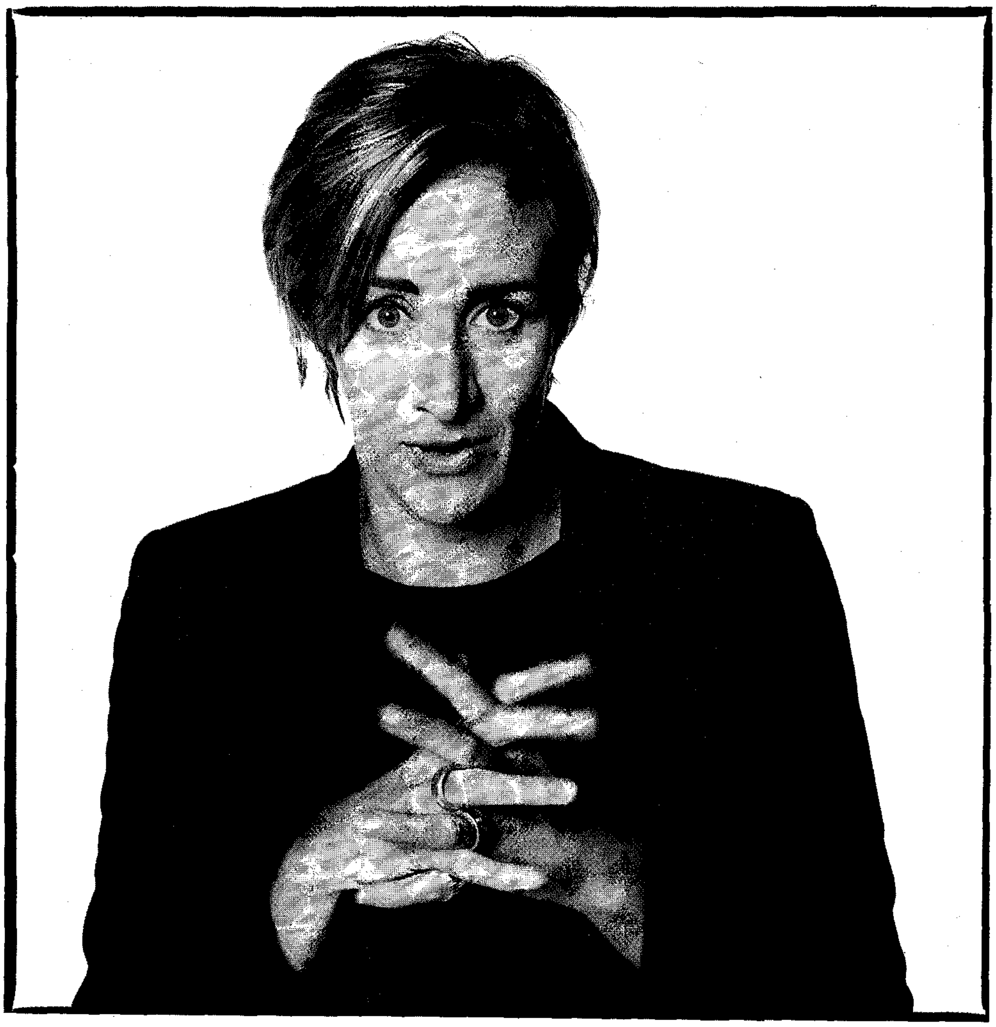
Krogstad's dreaded letter is finally delivered and sits ominously in the mailbox, which is visible through the glass panels of the living-room wall (shrewdly designed by Deirdre Clancy), while Nora famously tries to stall Torvald by rehearsing the tarantella for the next evening's festivities. "Teach me, correct me the way you usually do," she pleads, and begins an exercise in debasement that builds from a strut to a giddy whirl of desperation. When the reckoning happens, Torvald is in his cups and amorous; once he's read the letter, romance turns to rage. He sees things only through the prism of his career and of appearances. "Do you understand what you've done to me?" he says. "From now on you will stay in the house. But you won't be allowed to bring up the children. I daren't trust you with them." Then a second letter from Krogstad—this one enclosing the offending loan agreement—arrives, and they're suddenly safe again. (The volte-face was engineered by Mrs. Linde, who has fallen into a relationship with Krogstad.) The moment is Nora's epiphany. She goes to her room to get out of her tarantella costume, while Torvald stands backpedalling outside her door. "You bewildered, helpless, little creature. Nora, don't be frightened of anything," he says. He adds, "Have you changed?" Nora enters in her day clothes, and with one of Ibsen's best lines. "Yes, Torvald. I've changed now," she says.

In these last moments, McTeer and the production's interpretation seem to me inspired. She is not reading Torvald the riot act; there is nothing premeditated in her action. Nora's eyes are opening, and there is astonishment, fear, and shame at the clarity that, once seen, cannot be denied. "I have been performing tricks for you, Torvald," she says. "That's how I've survived. You wanted it like that." Her voice is not strident but tentative as she gropes with the new thoughts. "I must educate myself," she says, and McTeer manages to pronounce that concluding pronoun so that the notion of "self" rolls off her tongue like a revelation of possibility. At one point, she covers her eyes and sobs as she says, "It hurts me very much, Torvald, because you have always been so generous to me. But I can't help it." She adds, looking at him, "I do not love you anymore." Torvald tries to defend himself against her disenchantment. "No man sacrifices his integrity for the person he loves," he says. Nora raises her voice. "Hundreds of thousands of women have," she says. When she closes the door on Torvald, she takes only a photograph of her children, holding out the faint hope that "something glorious" might still happen. The curtain comes down on the shattered Torvald mouthing the words "something glorious"—puzzling over the miracle that Ibsen called the "revolution in the spirit of man," to which this production bears thrilling witness.

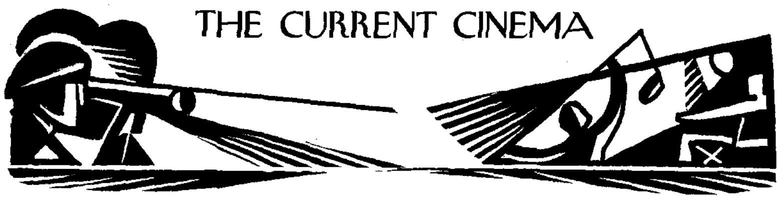
THE title of Horton Foote's Pulitzer Prize-winning "The Young Man from Atlanta" (at the Longacre, directed by Robert Falls) refers to Randy Carter, a character who never actually appears onstage in the play, which recently opened to high—and somewhat bewildering—praise. The drama is a house of cards propped up on the foundation of powerful performances by Rip Torn and Shirley Knight, who play Will and Lily Dale Kidder, the target of Randy's offstage badgering. He comes knocking at the door of the Kidders' newly built de-luxe Houston house in 1950, six months after the untimely death of their only child, Bill, who was thirty-seven. Unable to swim, Bill walked into a lake and drowned. We know he is the only son because in the space of the opening scene "only child" is repeated twice by Will and once by the man who is soon to fire Will from his high-paying job at the Sunshine Southern Wholesale Grocery for no apparent reason other than the exigencies of the plot. "I don't suppose you ever really get over such things. Not a son. Not an only son," the man says, and that's about as expressive as any exchange during the evening.

Randy was Bill's roommate in Atlanta and ten years his junior, and to the credulous, pious Lily Dale he is a solace. She believes the yarns he spins about her son's religiosity and his own poverty; she gives Randy a good portion of the money she's saved up over the years, and is forced finally to tell Will about it when he wants to borrow her cash to start a new business. The Christmas money Will gave his son has also ended up in Randy's account—a fact whose sexual implications Will keeps from Lily Dale until the end of the play. The big-bellied and bluff Will, who calls himself "a born competitor," won't take on Randy, who is something to be repelled and denied. "There are things that I'd have to ask him, and I don't want to know the answers," he explains to Lily Dale.

What Foote catches in the play's slow, clumsy exposition is the maneuvers of denial that sustain optimism. The Kidders can't help each other mourn: Lily Dale won't face the issue of suicide; Will won't face the issue of homosexuality. The audience gets the point within the first ten minutes and then spends the next two hours waiting for the light to come on in the couple's befogged minds. We expect to see something happen—a satisfying last-act encounter with Randy, perhaps, or a resonant stage picture. But nothing comes, except an improbable eleven-o'clock clinch between husband and wife. Meanwhile, the well-cast players amble on, unload their exposition, and amble off. Beatrice Winde, who plays a doddering former maid of the Kidders, is especially poignant—a totem of forthrightness in the face of the Kidders' grief-stricken evasions. Thomas Lynch's vast, intentionally textureless set and David C. Woolard's period costumes create more of a sense of character than the writing, which to me seemed a wash of mere characteristics. "The Young Man from Atlanta" has been compared to Chekhov; if that's true, this tale of anomie on the range is a twentieth-generation Xerox of the good doctor. Despite Foote's wry compassion, there's less here than meets the eye. ♦



Janet McTeer captures the full, darting playfulness of Ibsen's Nora. Photograph by David Bailey.



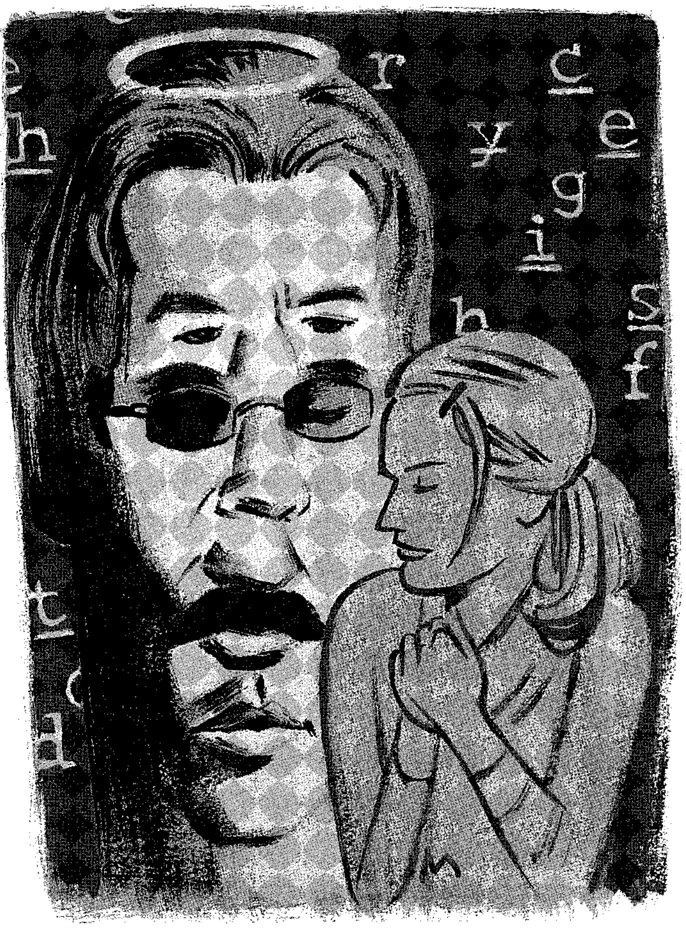
HOLY FOOLS

The experimental Dada of "The Saint," and Beresford's "Paradise Road."

BY ANTHONY LANE

THERE is a scene in the middle of "The Saint" that may, in time, come to be viewed as a critical moment in American movies. The Saint (Val Kilmer) and his young, blond, beautiful, poetry-reading, world-changing-scientist sidekick Emma (Elisabeth Shue)—in short, his girl—are rushing through watery tunnels in the bowels of modern Moscow. Our man is in a fix: the exits are blocked, and there are Russian-mafia goons coming up behind. Salvation arrives in the shape of a young, dark, beautiful, beret-wearing, gun-toting Russian art dealer who appears from the shadows, ushers him and Emma into a secret chamber, and tries to sell them some icons. When this attempt fails, she offers to lead them underground to the sanctuary of the American Embassy, pausing only to deliver an outrageous product placement for our hero's waterproof watch. As the action unfolded, I sat there with my jaw resting lightly on the floor, and I thought, This is it. This is what we have been heading for all these years. Here is a film that makes *no sense at all.*

That is no reason, of course, not to see it. On the contrary, there's something rather bracing in the thought that Paramount Pictures chose to offload enormous sums of money on what is essentially a Dadaist experiment. I've eaten bowls of spaghetti that were more tightly structured than this picture; it's meant to be a thriller, but what wound up on-screen suggests that the writers, Jonathan Hensleigh and Wesley Strick, were encouraged to free-associate—to jot down random ideas and lines of bad dialogue, toss them in a bucket, and leave it for the director, Phillip Noyce, to play grab bag. Plainly, none of these guys retain much loyalty to "The Saint," and you can't blame them. It's not as if the brand recognition were that strong. The old TV series, in which Roger Moore's smirk travelled the world in the fight against crime, boasted only a couple of gimmicks: first, the halo that appeared—ding!—above Roger's head at the start of each episode, and, second, the unalloyed joy of the fact that he drove a *Volvo.* Noyce's movie is tragically halo-free, and even the Volvo is a sporty red number; I was praying to see the Saint pull away in one of those station-wagon models from the seventies or eighties, built like a bus and stuffed with kids and Labradors.



Cold fusion: Val Kilmer and Elisabeth Shue.

To ascribe a plot to this film would be sycophancy; all one can say is that a few, unconnected events come to pass. An orphaned boy who calls himself Simon Templar is beaten by a Catholic priest. He grows up to be Val Kilmer—more punishment, I guess—and spends his days assuming various disguises. Although there is a flicker of continuing spiritual agony in the fact that his aliases are named after saints, Simon's main motive seems to be his Swiss bank account: "If I can just break fifty," he says, musing on his millions. He is commissioned to steal a microchip from a budding Russian dictator called Tretiak (Rade Serbedzija), who, in turn, asks him to pilfer a formula for cold-fusion technology from Emma the scientist. Just another job for the Saint, you say, but wait: Emma keeps the formula tucked in her bra. How can he pull off the heist without falling in love? What is the future of Mother Russia? And what about the other man in Emma's life, the poet Shelley? As she movingly puts it, "How can I love a man called Percy?"

These are dark waters, and Phillip Noyce, who once produced a work as crisp and efficient as "Dead Calm," wastes no time in muddying them further. Like some of the worst Bond pictures, the film staggers between high tech and low-camp comedy. The first half is especially strange, as the Saint switches teeth, hair, clothes, and accents in an attempt to remain invisible—a noble ambition, stymied only by the fact that almost every incarnation looks like Jim Morrison. Kilmer's face always appears a little swollen, as if fresh from a bruising; add the pretty-boy lips and you get a definite surge of alternating sexual current. At times, he is practically a drag queen, which is not a bad idea; given that the Saint is professionally and geographically promiscuous, why not make him a chameleon in the sack as well? The problem is that neither Kilmer nor Noyce can decide how funny these variations are supposed to be; you don't know where or whether to laugh, and you end up simply squirming. I finally had to cover my eyes when the Saint turned into a mournful South African artist with rolls of fifty-pound notes tucked down his leather pants. "I'm not very good with people," he murmured. You said it, Val. The trick with multiple roles, as Alec Guinness proved in "Kind Hearts and Coronets," and as Chevy Chase didn't in "Fletch," is not to show off; Guinness just vanished into the characters like a fakir. Kilmer has many qualities, but the wholesale abandonment of ego is not one of them.

Once Elisabeth Shue enters the equation, the weirdness rating of this movie jumps off the scale. Shue is vulnerability made flesh; it seems unlikely that she will ever really leave Las Vegas, and you have to ask whether someone whose eyes are such fathomless pools of pain would be able to hack it as an Oxford physicist. I suspect a sneaky joke on Noyce's part here: who would have imagined that cold fusion—going nuclear at room temperature—would be solved by a woman with a superheated soul? The film is so wildly miscast, and so indifferent to logic, that you can't help wondering whether Noyce's whole game plan is to mock the genre of the superhero and to jeer, rather unpleasantly, at our basic need to be drawn into the story. Maybe he's right: maybe, after duds like "The Shadow" and "The Phantom," only a movie as messy and vapid as this one can bring people to their senses and stop the flow. "Who are you?" Emma asks the Saint. "No one has a clue," he replies. "Least of all me."

"PARADISE ROAD" is a women's-prison movie, though of a particular kind. It is a sad and solemn Bruce Beresford film—a strength-through-endurance demonstration, as opposed to a Linda Blair-being-maltreated-in-the-showers extravaganza. The tale begins in 1942, as the colonial residents of Singapore—mostly English and Australian, with a dusting of Dutch and American—are jolted out of their gracious lives by the Japanese advance. The scenes that follow are staged with immense panache, and Beresford has the nerve to suggest that this chaotic exodus teeters on the verge of comedy. It's a visual nerve: his script tends to overplay its hand ("Nice night for the collapse of an empire," says one of the wives), and his chosen soundtrack duly moans with snatches of Elgar and Holst, but the camera tells a different, less doleful story. When a ship bearing women and children is attacked by Japanese planes, the images are so startling that, just like the victims, you have no time to prepare; the panic slices through you, and only afterward do you think about the dreadful beauty of the shell bursts, black as night against a clear sky.

This opening half hour is so quick that Beresford is able to land his central characters—survivors from the stricken vessel—on the island of Sumatra, lock them in captivity under the Japanese, and still have most of the movie to play with. Not that there's much to be playful about: founded on the reminiscences of real prisoners, the story claws its way through horror and stoicism, turning up only meagre scraps of grace—the choir, for instance, which was formed by the women to entertain themselves and, where possible, to soothe the savage breasts of their captors. One of the guards, a doughy brute at the best of times, is actually moved to croon a Japanese melody in return; even if this actually happened, there is something risible in the gesture toward redemption. These people set a woman on fire for trying to obtain quinine; who cares if they can sing?

"Paradise Road" is a full-throated ensemble piece, and Beresford has built himself a formidable cast: Glenn Close, Julianna Margulies, Joanna Ter Steege, Frances McDormand, Pauline Collins, the fine and purposeful young Australian actress Cate Blanchett, and Jennifer Ehle, who was last seen as Lizzie Bennet in the BBC "Pride and Prejudice." Why the entire Japanese Army doesn't fall to its knees and commit mass ritual suicide in her honor is, quite frankly, beyond comprehension. The depth of the acting here works in two directions: all the actresses—with the odd exception of Frances McDormand, whose stiff Teutonic doctor suffers from a worrying case of Fargoitis—pull their weight, but the result is that the picture has no true center. Beresford moves democratically from one figure to the next, nudging each into the spotlight and occasionally switching one off for good, but we never stay focussed on anyone long enough to become, as it were, captivated. "Paradise Road" is honorable and unrisky, trapped in its own heartbreak; it lacks the searching wildness that Beresford happened upon in a movie like "Black Robe." He needs to escape, I suspect, into his real subject—not prisoners of war but war itself. ♦

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SHOUTS & MURMURS

AVOID THAT SINKING FEELING

BY BRUCE McCALL

CRACK maritime accountants calculate that combined production costs for the upcoming Broadway musical "Titanic" and the summer blockbuster movie of the same name add up to less than what the White Star Line spent on goose down for first-class-cabin pillows on the forty-five-thousand-ton, triple-screw "unsinkable" steamship R.M.S. Titanic.

Titanic Truth—or Gargantuan Lie? Not sure? Not good enough, now that the late, lamented floating palace is due to be on Americans' minds and tongues more in the coming weeks than at any time since that Night to Remember. Let the following titillating Titanic tidbits be your verbal lifeboat through the conversational icebergs of the social season's No. 1 topic.

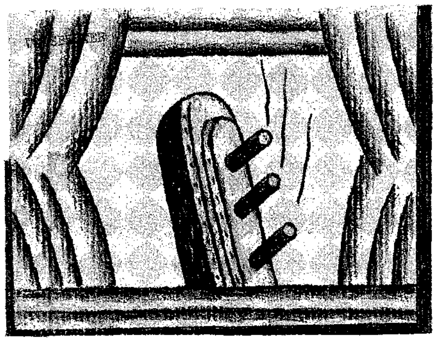
The survivor who escaped the sinking of the Titanic by making a one-man coracle out of the humidor in the first-class smoking lounge and floating free was (a) Sir Cosmo Duff Gordon, (b) Mrs. Harry Houdini, (c) Robert Oppenheimer, the boy.

Fact or fiction? The rousing show-stopper "Just Desserts," which brought down the curtain on Act I of the new Broadway musical before being cut in previews, is based on recent research proving that what actually sank the Titanic was not an iceberg but the weight of too many big fat rich people stuffing themselves with Baked Alaska and blancmange in the grillroom far forward on A Deck.

The name of the Titanic's onboard band was (a) the Ti-Tones, (b) Salty Waters and the Nep-Tones, (c) the Tone-Tanics; and their closing number was (a) "Nearer My God to Thee," (b) "Autumn," (c) all-request program.

True or false: Director James Cameron's forthcoming hundred-and-eighty-seven-million-dollar film bases its plot on computer simulations showing that the Leviathan of the sea-lanes would have collided off Martha's Vineyard with the freighter Edgar Rice Burroughs and sunk the following day anyway, with even greater loss of life.

The white paint on the Titanic's superstructure alone weighed more than (a) Guglielmo Marconi's entire family, (b) a pound of feathers, (c) the Lord Mayor of the City of Birmingham's desk.



Doyenne of TV sob hens Barbara Walters, on learning that survivors of the Titanic disaster were all too dead to be interviewed, sold her shares in the Broadway musical and went into seclusion at the home of her close chum King of Pop Michael Jackson—who in 1988 purchased (a) both femurs of, (b) the right elbow of, (c) the left leg of Titanic Captain Edward John Smith for 5.6 million dollars.

More than ______ people had to be evacuated from their homes in Pompeii, Ohio, in 1972, when an actual-size marzipan model of the R.M.S. Titanic melted at the Lava City Mall during Titanic Summer Bargain Days.

Which is correct: (a) A night not to forget any time soon, (b) A night I'd like to forget, (c) The night they forgot to remember, (d) Remember that night?

Laid end to end, the rivets in the hull of the Titanic would reach around the base of the Great Pyramid of Cheops for a distance of seventeen hundred and thirty-three royal cubits—which "happens" to be the same number as (a) the 1912 Belfast street address of the assistant chief engineer of the Titanic's sister ship Olympic, (b) the year of birth of the great-grandfather of the man whose great-granddaughter Bridget Mooney overslept and missed embarking on the fateful voyage, (c) the number of Titanic oven mitts sold in calendar year 1913.

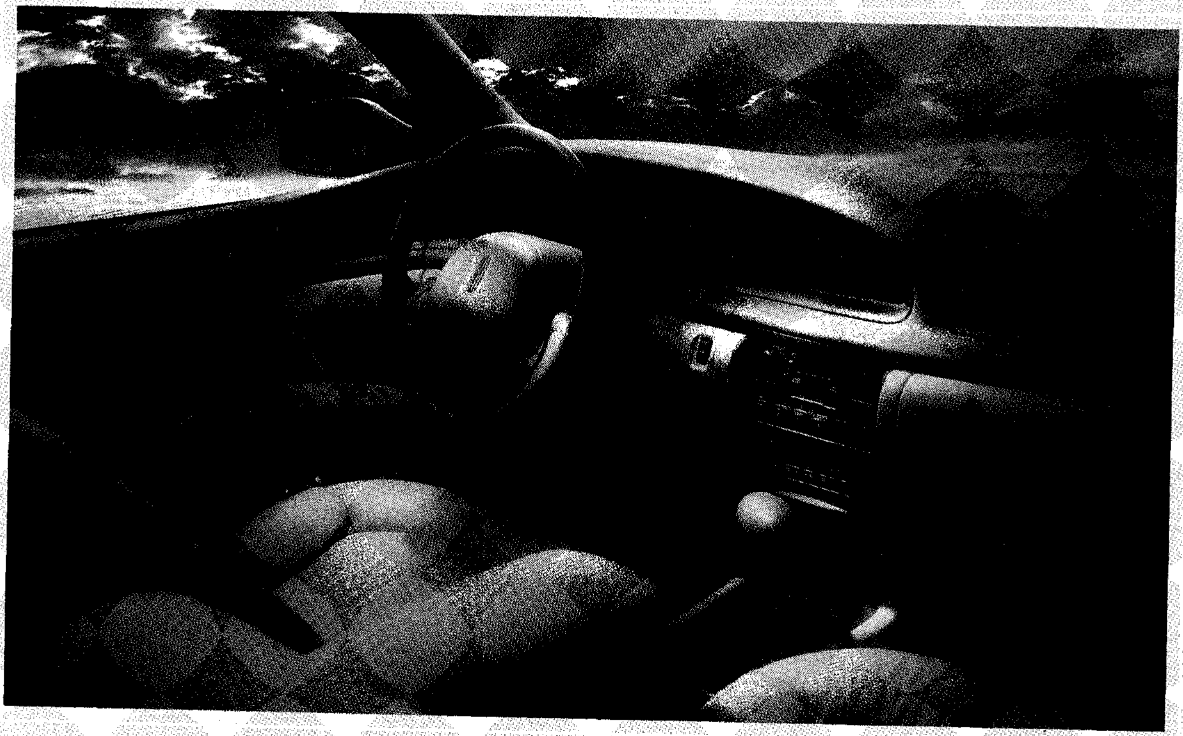
Lie or otherwise? According to a worldwide stationery-store survey, Titanic-brand gum erasers have outsold the Sentry, the Sentinel, the Guardian, and the Squadron brands every year since 1906—*except* 1912.

The name of the Titanic's other sister ship was (a) Endemic, (b) Pandemic, (c) Bulimic, (d) Elsie.

The steerage women's-shower scene in Act I of the Broadway musical uses an estimated ______ imperial gallons of genuine Atlantic seawater.

Titanic's alleged "fifth funnel" was (a) never found, (b) found but then lost again, (c) the subject of an in-depth thirty-two-page investigative report in the upcoming eighty-fifth-anniversary issue of the Titanic funnel fanzine *Where There's Smoke.*

True or false: Unused reservations for high tea in the Titanic's second-class salon can be redeemed today at any Tad's Steaks or TGI Friday's. ♦



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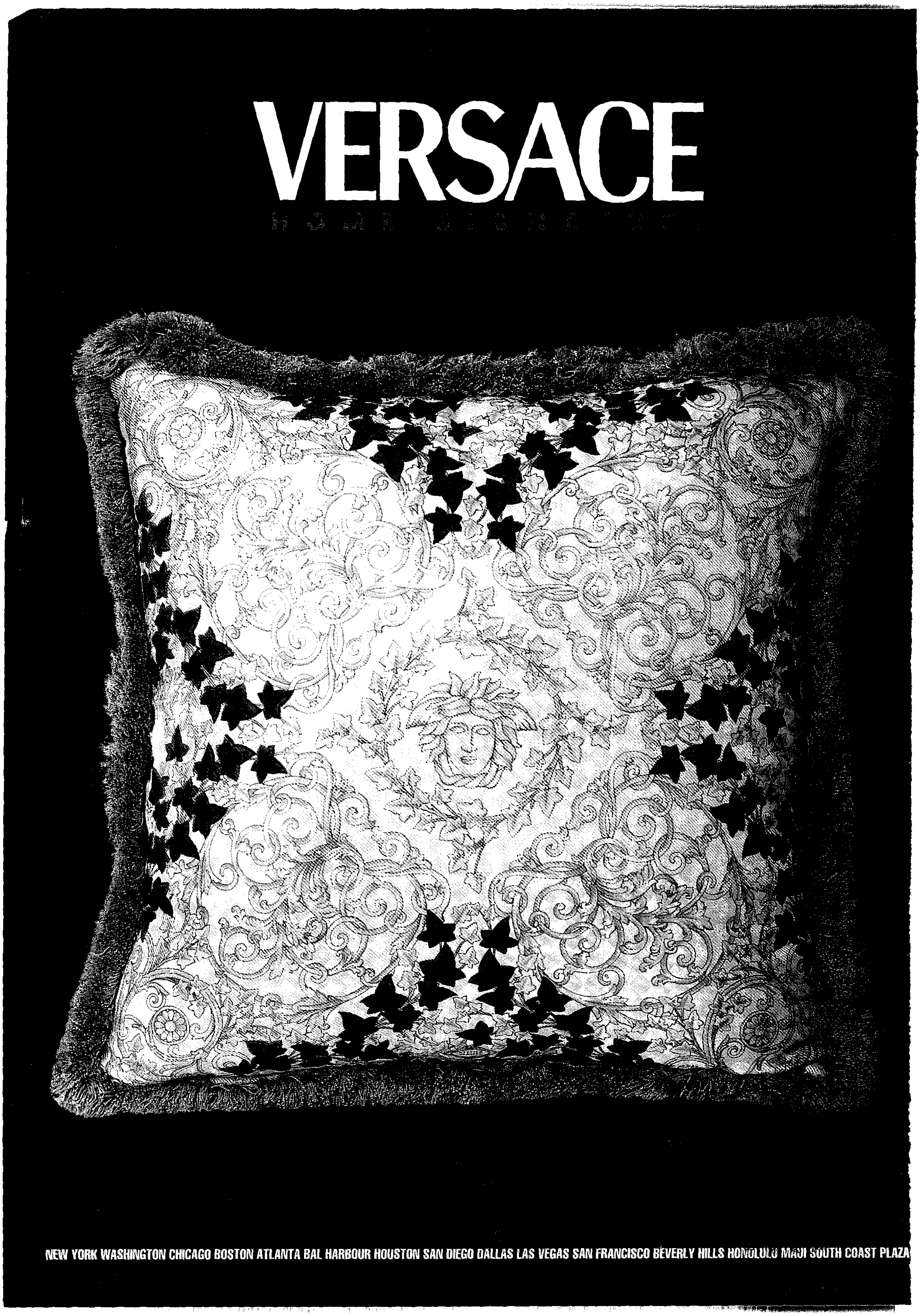VERSACE
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